

# Pre-approved Plans for Accessory Dwelling Units

# DESIGN CRITERIA SURVEY RESULTS NOVEMBER 2019

## What are ADUs?

Accessory dwelling units are small, secondary homes located on the same lot as an existing residence. Since 2010, Seattle has allowed detached ADUs (DADUs) in single-family zones — but most eligible lots do not have one.

## Why encourage ADUs?

- » More places to rent in neighborhoods where housing is often unaffordable
- » For ADU owners, a path to generate income and wealth
- » Homes for families with children, aging in place, multigenerational households, and people with disabilities
- » New in-city housing near transit and jobs, helping decrease sprawl

In July 2019, the City of Seattle passed the nation’s most progressive rules for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). By allowing residents to create two ADUs on their lot, increasing size limits, and removing off-street parking and owner-occupancy requirements, we can allow more of these affordable and space-efficient homes in our neighborhoods.

Yet we know that, on their own, these changes will not make it possible for everyone to own or rent an ADU. That’s why we’re now addressing other barriers to ADU production, as outlined in Mayor Jenny Durkan’s **Executive Order**.

The process to create an ADU can sometimes feel complex or intimidating. To simplify and streamline permitting, the City will offer pre-approved construction plans for DADUs. Homeowners choosing a pre-approved DADU plan get a faster and more predictable permit review process and reduced permit fees. Plans selected for pre-approval will be featured in an online gallery on the City’s ADU website.

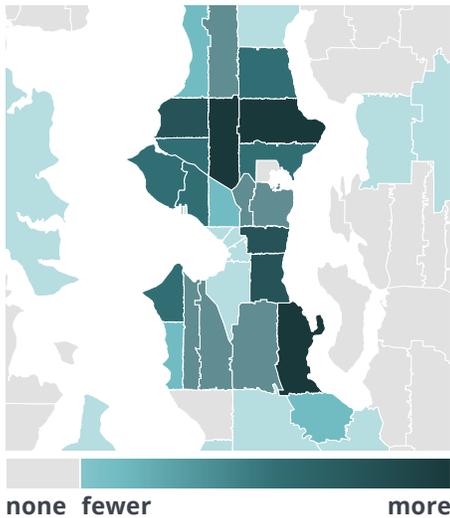
**Sept 30—Oct 21**  
Design criteria survey

**November 2019**  
Call for submissions

**January 2020**  
Submissions due

Our first step in this effort was a public survey about design principles we should consider when selecting DADU plans for pre-approval. We launched the survey on September 30, 2019, and collected responses through October 21. This report summarizes major themes from those responses, which will inform the submission process and selection criteria. More detail on all that is coming soon.

**Responses by zip code**



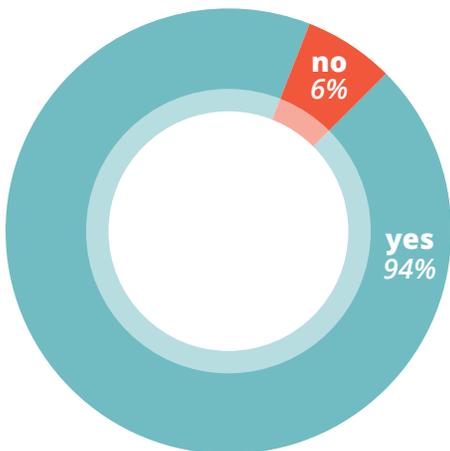
**who responded to the survey?**

We received 568 survey responses in total. The first section of the survey included background questions about respondents. We also asked additional optional demographic questions at the end of the survey; we summarize those answers at the end of this report.

Ninety-four percent of respondents currently live in Seattle. We received responses from most Seattle zip codes. Most respondents were homeowners and live in an area of detached homes with yards, though we also heard from people living on blocks with townhouses, duplexes, and apartments.

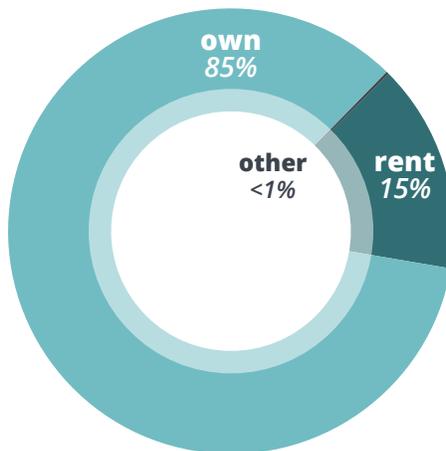
**Do you currently live in Seattle?**

n=564



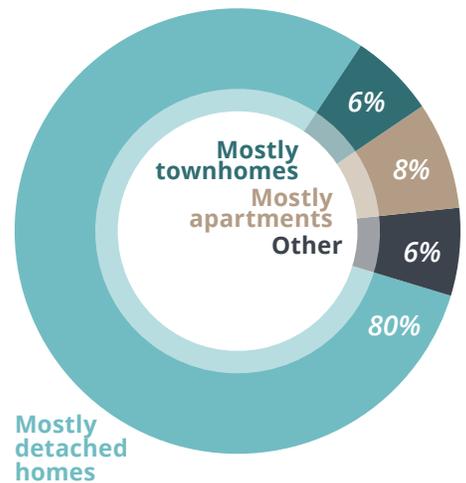
**Is your home rented or owned by you or someone you live with?**

n=564



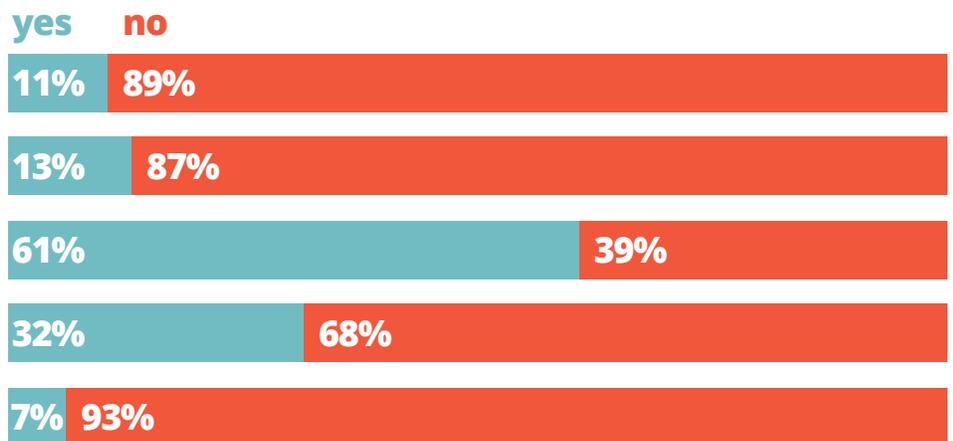
**What type of housing characterizes the block where you live?**

n=565



For insight into what interested respondents in ADUs, we asked if they had firsthand experience owning or living in an ADU or professional experience in a related field.

- I own or have owned an attached or detached ADU***
- I live or have lived in an attached and detached ADU***
- I'm considering creating an attached or detached ADU***
- I am an architect or have a similar profession***
- I am a homebuilder or general contractor***





credit **Ed Sozinho / Best Practice Architecture**



credit **microhouse**



credit **CAST Architecture**



credit **live-work-play architecture**

## **design principles**

We presented four photographs of DADUs in Seattle, shown at left, and asked what respondents thought of their design. Here are some themes from the responses:

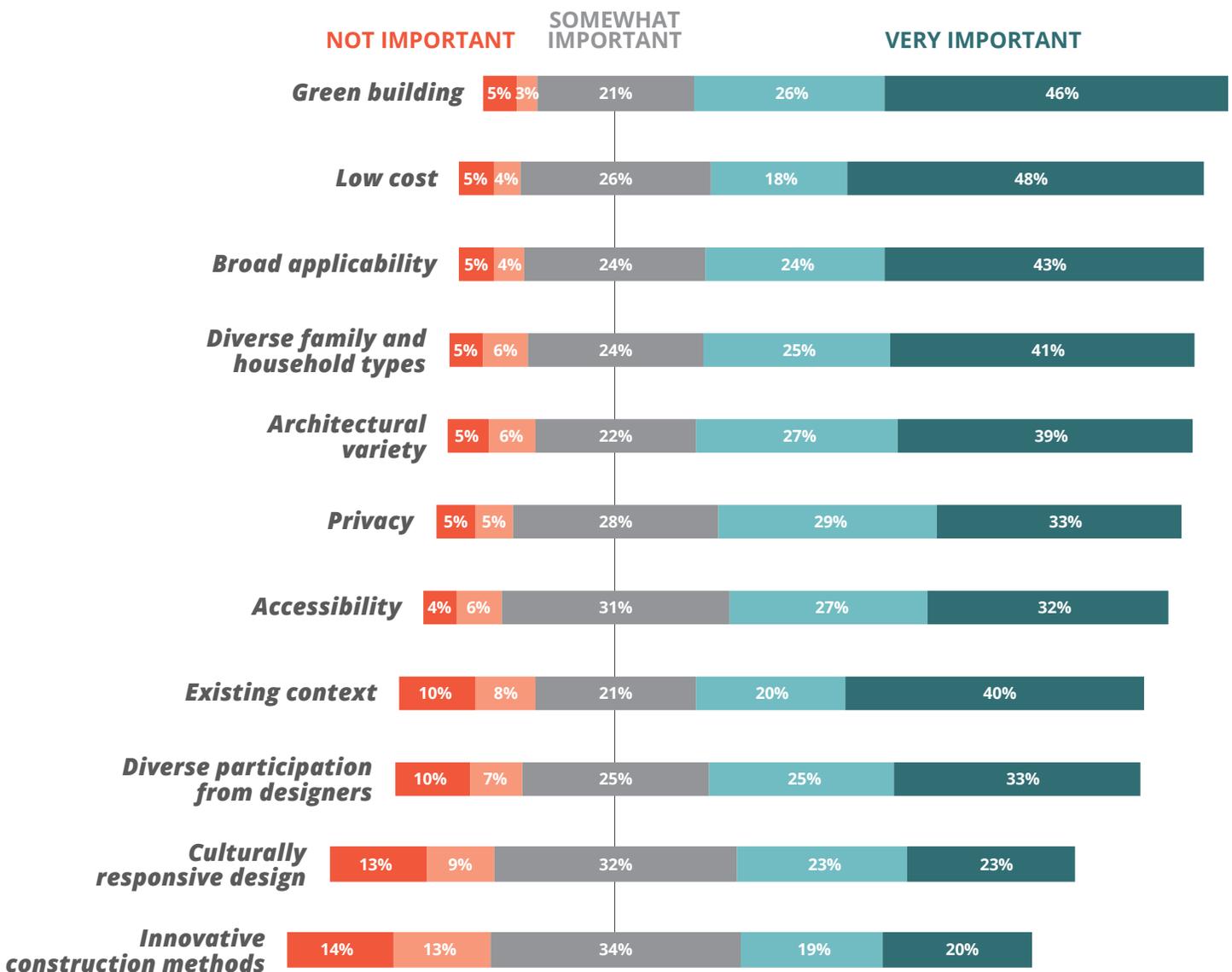
- » **Aesthetic preferences vary widely.** Many comments, positive and negative, addressed material choices, window design, color, and architectural styles including modern, contemporary, craftsman, tudor, and colonial, among others.
- » **Respondents identified design choices that affect cost.** For example, custom window packages and certain material choices might be less economical, while a compact footprint and siding like HardiePanel lower the cost to build.
- » **Successful designs respond to site and context.** Some respondents lauded design choices that reflect a site's opportunities and constraints or the architecture and climate of the Pacific Northwest.
- » **Individual site considerations.** Many respondents shared observations about what would or would not work well on their particular property.
- » **Unit size matters — but the ideal size varies among households.** Small ADUs won't work for some families, while a large footprint would occupy too much lot area for others.
- » **Accessibility is a critical feature for many prospective ADU owners.** Respondents frequently mentioned designing with an older adult or aging in place in mind.
- » **Comments suggest a tradeoff between footprint and height.** Taller DADUs provide living space within an efficient footprint. But some respondents expressed concern about how a second story affects privacy.
- » **The relationship of the ADU and house matters.** While the photographs did not show the main house, respondents often expressed interest in design compatibility and in space for interaction between residents of the house and ADU.
- » **Opinion on roof styles varies.** We showed pitched and angled roof types, and all elicited positive and negative reactions.
- » **Consideration of trees.** Some comments encouraged designs that accommodate trees, either through their massing, compact footprint or permeable deck materials.
- » **Various types of spaces are valuable.** Respondents expressed interest in designs that include patios, rooftop decks, storage, and garages.

## selection criteria

Our survey then presented the draft selection criteria we've developed and asked respondents about the importance of each criterion. We then asked what other criteria should guide our choice of plans to pre-approve.

Overall, the survey results suggest our draft criteria are generally on the right track. For every criterion, responses of "important" and "very important" together outnumbered other responses. Still, some factors rose the top, and others garnered mixed opinions.

**Green building** and **low cost** were the top two factors, with almost half of respondents ranking these criteria favorably. On the other hand, a substantial share of respondents provided lower ranking for **innovative construction methods** and **culturally responsive design**, though responses suggest some people were confused by our description of culturally responsive design.



## DRAFT CRITERIA

**Green building.** Incorporate green building features, like stormwater management, passive heating and cooling, or sustainable materials.

**Low cost.** Encourage lower-cost designs available to households with the widest possible range of incomes.

**Broad applicability.** Choose a range of designs likely to meet development standards on most lots and appropriate for various lot conditions, including lots with and without an alley, sloping sites, corner lots, and narrow lots.

**Diverse family and household types.** Accommodate the needs of individuals, families with children, older adults, larger families, and multigenerational households.

**Architectural variety.** Provide homeowners a range of aesthetic styles to choose from.

**Privacy.** Consider the relationship of the main house and neighboring lots through design, configuration, profile, and window placement.

**Accessibility.** Incorporate accessibility and universal design features suitable for aging in place and visitable by people with disabilities.

**Existing context.** Consider compatibility with the existing development pattern and architectural context in Seattle's low-density residential neighborhoods.

**Diverse participation from designers.** Encourage submissions from younger and emerging architects, women- and minority-owned business (WMBE), and firms who can conduct business in languages other than English.

**Culturally responsive design.** Consider and reflect the diverse needs and experiences of Seattle residents through ADU design or configuration.

**Innovative construction methods.** Support new construction and delivery methods, such as panelized, modular, or pre-fab homes.

In addition to the draft criteria, described in full at left, respondents suggested other criteria that should guide our choice of plans to pre-approve:

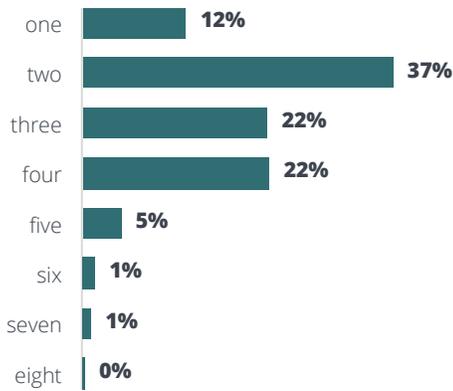
- » **Broader and longer-term environmental costs.** Comments encouraged consideration of full life-cycle costs, minimal fossil fuel use, nontoxic interior materials, urban heat island effect, and dark-sky impacts from light pollution.
- » **Site specific considerations.** Some responses suggested criteria, like the relationship of the ADU and main house or the characteristics of infrastructure in the neighborhood, that could be difficult to assess as part of the plan selection process, but could inform how we monitor ADU production over time.
- » **A balance of low cost, durability, and aesthetic quality.**
- » **Constructability and predictability.** Respondents suggested choosing designs that can be constructed quickly, simply, and for a predictable cost.
- » **DIY opportunities.** Respondents encouraged designs that allow homeowners to do a substantial amount of the construction themselves.
- » **Flexibility.** Respondents emphasized the desirability of allowing mix-and-match options, such as multiple roof options, that make the design somewhat customizable.
- » **Community design.** Create a sense of shared community in the relationship of the ADU with the main house and neighboring lots through design, configuration, profile, window placement.
- » **Support for local industry.** Encourage local sourcing of materials and employment of local craftspeople.
- » **Tiny homes.** Some responses encouraged including tiny homes on wheels in this effort.<sup>1</sup>
- » **Retention or creation of green space and trees.** Respondents noted the environmental and aesthetic value of trees, recognizing that conditions and opportunities will vary on each site.

<sup>1</sup> The City of Seattle regulates tiny houses on wheels like camper trailers. Living in a tiny house on wheels (or similar equipment, like RVs and boats) is not allowed on lots in Seattle city limits. Tiny houses with wheels must follow the parking rules for vehicles.

## responses to demographic questions

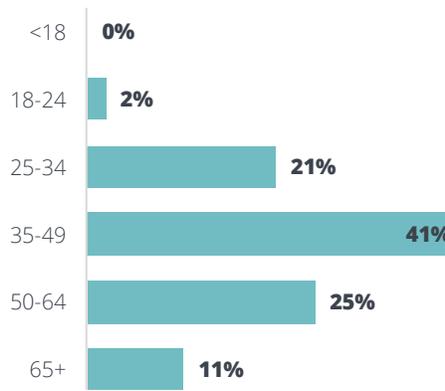
### How many people live in your household?

n=417



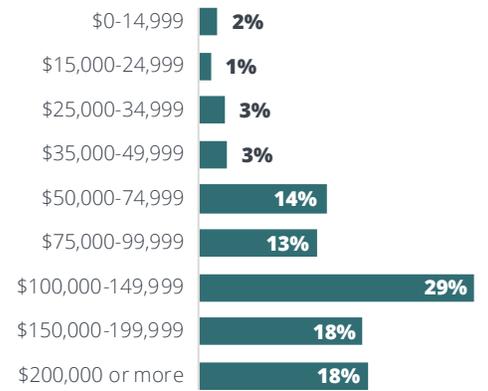
### What is your age?

n=441



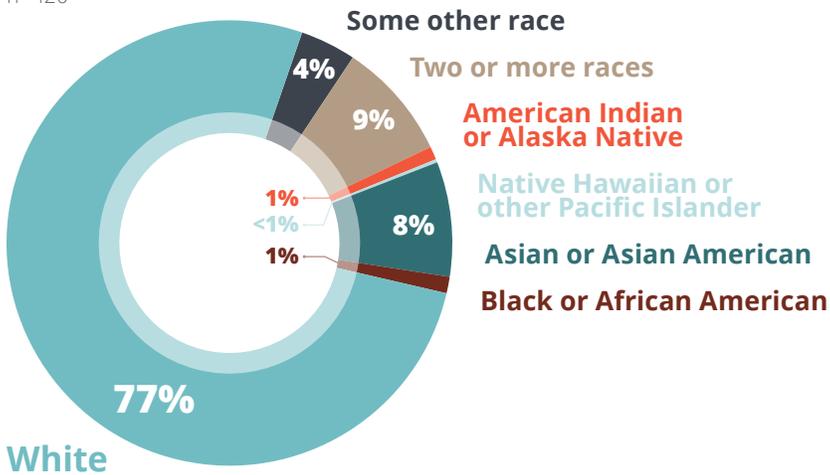
### What is your annual household income?

n=405



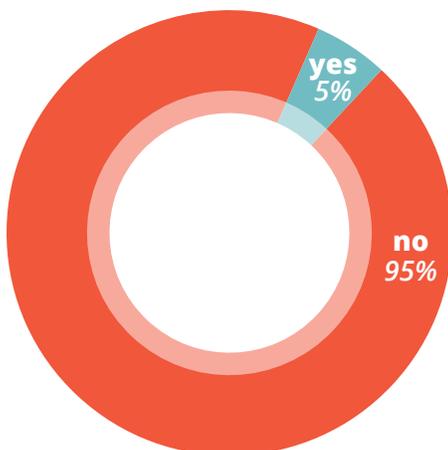
### What is your race?

n=420



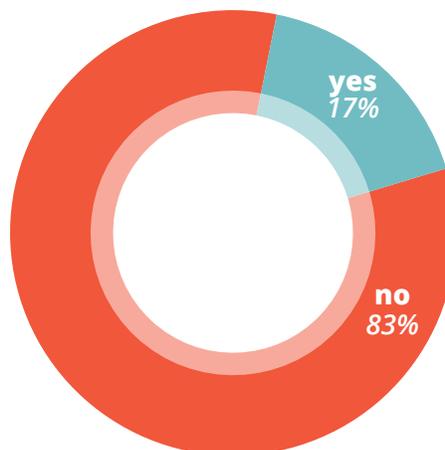
### Are you of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin?

n=427



### Do you identify as LGBTQIA?

n=419



### Are you a person with a disability?

n=423

