

ADUniverse 2.0

Pre-Approved Plans for ADUs and Middle Housing

SUBMISSION GUIDE

SUMMARY

- We invite designers, architects, and homebuilders to submit ADU and middle housing designs that fulfill the criteria and follow the requirements outlined in this guide
- A selection committee reviews submissions and identifies plans that City permitting staff will pre-approve for compliance with certain codes. The City will pay for this review. Designers retain ownership of their plans.
- Pre-approved plans are displayed in a gallery on ADUniverse, where applicants can browse and contact a designer if interested in using their plan.
- A pre-approved plan can provide the applicant with a faster, simpler, and more predictable permitting process.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2026, [new legislation](#) took effect for residential areas in Seattle that expands options for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and other middle housing types. As required under Washington House Bill 1110, all residential properties can now have at least four homes, with greater flexibility for how these homes are designed, configured, and sold. These changes primarily affected Seattle's Neighborhood Residential (NR) zoning, which has been updated with new standards (see Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 23.44 or this [summary of key changes](#)).

We enter this new chapter of housing in Seattle following several years of growth in the production of ADUs after liberalizing our ADU rules in 2019 and launching [ADUniverse](#) in 2020. From 2021 to 2025, the City issued permits for nearly 1,000 ADUs each year, a fourfold increase over pre-2019 activity and evidence of high demand for housing choices in residential areas near parks, schools, and quiet, safe streets. Among other resources, ADUniverse includes a gallery of pre-approved ADU plans that offer a faster and more predictable permitting pathway. Since 2020, several hundred permits have been issued for these pre-approved plans.

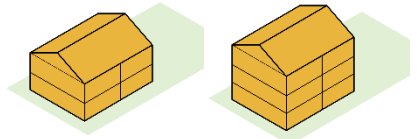
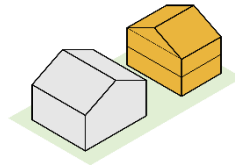
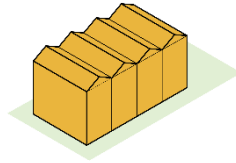
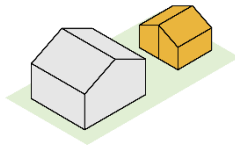
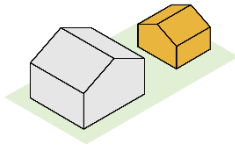
To support implementation of new NR zoning, catalyze creation of middle housing, and boost housing production, the City of Seattle is updating ADUniverse with a refreshed and expanded catalog of pre-approved plans that reflect the diverse typology of middle housing now allowed throughout our residential zones.

This Submission Guide provides:

- A summary of the middle housing forms we are seeking
- Selection criteria
- Submission requirements
- The pre-approval process for selected designs

TYOLOGY OF DESIGNS FOR PRE-APPROVAL

We invite submissions of the following housing types:



Form	Single detached unit	Ground-related duplex	Ground-related triplex / fourplex	Stacked duplex	Stacked triplex, fourplex, or sixplex
Description	A single unit that could be permitted as an ADU or principal unit, up to three stories	Two ground-related attached units that could be permitted as a Double DADU, a principal unit with AADU, or two principal units, up to three stories	Three or four attached units, similar to a townhouse or rowhouse form, up to three stories	Two-story duplex with one home per level Could be permitted as two ADUs, a principal unit with AADU, or two principal units	Two- or three-story structure with three to six stacked units
Potential configurations	Could be permitted as a single home or arranged as up to 4+ cottages on one site	Could be permitted as a single duplex or as 2-3 placed on one site that can accommodate 4-6 units Orientation on the lot could be side by side or front to back	Could be configured for interior and/or corner lots	Could be permitted as a single duplex or as 2-3 placed on one site that can accommodate 4-6 units	Could be infill while preserving existing home (e.g., a triplex added to a site that allows four units) or as one new structure on a lot.
Applicable construction code	SRC	SRC	SRC	SRC	SBC

For all housing types, we are interested in:

- Designs with unit sizes from roughly 750 to 1,500 square feet, depending on the particular housing form and its feasibility on typical lots
- Plans designed with typical lots of 4,000 to 8,000 square feet in mind
- Configurations and orientations that consider interior and corner lots

As part of this typology, we aim to curate a gallery of designs that, collectively, reflect the following:

- **Accessible units.** We seek designs that meet accessibility requirements. Some people require a single-story accessible design. We recognize that accessibility depends in part on site conditions, which vary for each lot where these plans might be used. Still, single-story units designed with accessibility in mind meet the needs of some residents. We also encourage plans that, even if not fully accessible, include universal design features and are visitable¹ for at least some units. For stacked housing forms, consider the accessibility of ground-floor units.
- **Range of unit sizes.** To serve various household types and sizes, we seek designs with one, two, and three bedrooms. We particularly encourage designs with at least two bedrooms, since larger households and families with children may need multiple bedrooms to meet their needs.
- **Single- and multi-level designs.** Given the accessibility and size goals above, we anticipate selecting designs that vary in terms of arrangement of space vertically and horizontally.
- **Flexibility.** For types like single detached units and side-by-side duplexes, we welcome submissions of designs that can be modified for multiple unit sizes and configurations where feasible. For example, a one-bedroom base design could include an option to add a second bedroom that does not modify the remainder of the plan. Such design options can be considered as part of one pre-approved plan.
- **Garage and storage.** ADUs and dwelling units smaller than 1,200 square feet do not require off-street parking requirement. Other housing generally requires one space per two dwelling units. Though not always required, we welcome submissions of designs with and without attached garages. We also welcome (but do not require) thoughtful inclusion of bike storage and other amenities.
- **Amenity spaces.** In the updated Neighborhood Residential (NR) legislation, Section 23.44.110 includes requirements for amenity area. While full compliance with this standard requires a complete site plan, we encourage designs that offer a clear pathway to compliance and welcome designs with open space features including porches, balconies, and roof decks.
- **Repeatability.** As noted in the typology above, several housing types could be permitted in multiple configurations. For example, a single detached unit could be permitted once or multiple times on a site; a stacked duplex could be permitted once in a backyard or two to three times on one lot as a four- or six-unit development project. We welcome designs that consider these options for configuration in their submission.

SELECTION CRITERIA & PROCESS

To review submissions, the City will convene a selection committee composed of volunteer members of City Boards and Commissions, plus City staff.

Submissions will be assessed on the following criteria:

- **Affordable to construct.** Designs that can be constructed easily, quickly, predictably, and at relatively lower cost.
- **Energy efficient.** Designs that include green building and design features, passive heating and cooling, renewable energy generation, etc.
- **Repeatability.** Designs that can be configured well in multiples on a site.
- **Easy to live in.** Efficient, comfortable unit design and layout.
- **Creativity.** In form and design
- **Contextual design.** Potential for compatibility with common architectural contexts and privacy considerations in relationship to common lot configurations in Seattle residential neighborhoods.

¹ While full accessibility supports long-term use by people with mobility limitations, visitability provides the most essential features to enable a person with mobility limitations to visit or live in a home at least temporarily. Three core visitability features include a zero-step entrance, minimum widths for ground-floor doorways and hallways, and a ground-floor bathroom. Visibility can also include reinforcement in walls next to toilets for future installation of grab bars, and light switches and electrical outlets within comfortable reach for all.

ELIGIBILITY

- Competition is open to all architects, building designers, manufacturers, homebuilders, construction companies, and students. We welcome designs that have been previously built. Multiple submissions from one entity are also welcome. Any design for a structure with three or more units must be stamped by an architect and engineer.
- Designers whose submissions are selected agree to work with City staff to further develop their design to permit submittal level.
- The City will cover the cost to review and approve selected designs as a pre-approved plan (i.e., a Standard Plan as described in [Tip 310](#)).
- Selected designs will be featured on ADUniverse.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- Submissions are due by July 3, 2026.
- Complete online [submission form on OpenGov](#)
 - Name and contact information
 - Project description (150 words maximum)
 - Identification of housing type (choose from set of options)
 - Narrative describing how the submissions fulfills the design criteria (300 words maximum)
 - PDF attachment (up to three 22” x 34” pages as described below)
- Designs should reflect the “design development” level of detail
- Submissions may include up to three 22” x 34” pages in PDF format showing:
 - Floor plans (1/4” scale) with dimensioned room sizes
 - Building sections (1/4” scale) showing wall and roof assembly
 - Building elevations (1/4” scale)
 - Three-dimensional views (maximum of six)
 - Major materials
 - List of mechanical systems
 - Diagrams for site adaptability. Include sketches that help reviewers understand how the design could be used in different contexts or configurations, such as:
 - How the design can be used as standalone home in the rear yard (preserving an existing structure) and/or in a series of multiples (if the entire site is redeveloped)
 - How the design can be used on mid-block and corner lots
 - Viability on a range of lot sizes from roughly 4,000 to 8,000 square feet, as applicable
 - Assumptions about minimum setback to property line and distance to other dwelling units on the site, if applicable
 - Options the design includes, such as:
 - Roof form
 - Addition of a bedroom
 - Window packages
 - Material variations
 - Open space options (e.g., porches, balconies)

APPLICABLE CODES

- **Land Use Code.** Designs must comply with the updated standards for Neighborhood Residential (NR) zones. However, we also intend to pre-approve designs for compliance with Lowrise (LR) zone standards whenever possible to increase the utility of the plans.
- **Construction codes.** As noted in the typology above, certain housing types are subject to the 2021 Seattle Building Code and will be reviewed for compliance with that code. Once pre-approved, use of these designs subject to the SBC will likely have a longer permitting pathway compared to one- and two-family structures subject to the SRC. While the forthcoming 2024 SRC, which would be effective no

sooner than May 2027, will apply to 3-6 stacked units up to three stories, any selected submissions in response to this brief will be reviewed under, and therefore must comply with, the 2021 SBC.

- **Energy Code.** Designs must comply with the 2021 Seattle Energy Code. A design subject to the 2021 SBC will need to comply with the 2021 Seattle Energy Code Commercial Provisions.
- **Stormwater Code.** Plans may be subject to drainage review based on the total new plus replaced hard surface (NPRHS) associated with your design, including new structures, eaves, walkways, patios, driveways, etc. For this reason, we encourage design submissions that consider the following thresholds and therefore may be less likely to require drainage review:
 - **Projects with less than 750 square feet** of NPRHS will not require drainage review.
 - **Projects with 750 up to 1,500 square feet** of NPRHS may receive expedited drainage review if not located in an environmentally critical area (ECA).
 - **Projects with 1,500 square feet or more** of NPRHS, and any project in an ECA, will require full drainage review.
- **ECAs.** Projects on sites with ECAs require full ECA review and are not eligible for several of the benefits of using a pre-approved plan, including expedited intake or reviews. Projects that obtain an ECA exception or small project waiver may then be able to use the expedited process. SDCI maintains an [online map](#) that identifies sites that may have an ECA.

In future building code cycles, all pre-approved designs will need to be re-reviewed for compliance with updated codes. Designers agree to work with the City to prepare any revisions required in future code updates. As noted above, certain designs currently subject to the 2021 SBC for 3-6 stacked units up to three stories would be re-reviewed under the 2024 SRC, which will take effect no sooner than May 2027. These designs would also be re-reviewed under the 2024 Seattle Energy Code Residential Provisions.

ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

- Call for submissions released (early May 2026)
- Submissions due (July 3, 2026)
- Selected plans announced (August 2026)
- Selected designers create and submit full permit-ready plans (September–October 2026)
- SDCI pre-approval (October 2026)
- Plans are pre-approved and updated gallery launches on ADUniverse (November 2026)

PROCESS AFTER SELECTION

Plans selected for pre-approval must submit a full permit-ready plan set for review by SDCI staff with additional detail and specifications meeting City submittal requirements, including:

- Glazing and opaque door schedule
- Framing and foundation plans
- Architectural and structural details
- Energy calculations if you are not using prescriptive compliance methods
- Heating equipment sizing calculation form
- Structural calculations (optional)
- Structural notes including design loads (when plans are using an engineer design for wind and seismic provisions, lateral design should address the most conservative assumptions in Seattle)

Structures subject to the Seattle Building Code (SBC) must additionally include:

- Structural design performed by a licensed structural engineer in the State of Washington
- Mandatory accessibility requirements, for projects with four or more stacked units

Selected designers must agree to:

- Have their plan featured on ADUniverse
- Sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the City regarding the use of their design and their responsibilities related to copyright protection, liability, and insurance required of participants
- License their plans for a fee (up to \$1,000 for a single unit, \$2,000 for two-unit designs, and \$3,000 for four- and six-plex designs)
- Provide additional services (site plan prep, permitting support) for a stipulated hourly rate or fee(s)

Plans selected for pre-approval should follow the submission requirements identified in the following tip sheets:

- [Tip 106: General Standards for Plans and Drawings](#)
- [Tip 303: Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-Family and Two-Unit Dwellings](#)
- [Tip 303A: Common Seattle Residential Code Requirements](#)

USING A PRE-APPROVED PLAN

Applicants interested in using a pre-approved plan should expect to follow this general process:

- Browse our ADUniverse gallery. Once pre-approved by SDCI staff, plans will be featured on ADUniverse with a description of the design, dimensions and specifications, the cost to license the plan, additional services the designer offers and their cost (e.g., site planning), and information about the designer, who retains ownership of their design.
- Connect with the plan's designer. To use a pre-approved plan, an applicant connects with its designer, who can prepare the full site plan necessary to get a construction permit. The designer's hourly rate for this service will be included in the plan description.
- Finalize your design. In general, changes to a pre-approved plan's structural features are not possible. To offer variation and flexibility, some adjustments are allowed. A pre-approved plan may offer choices for design elements like roof line (e.g., pitched roof, shed roof), floor plans (e.g., a base plan with an option for an additional bedroom with no other changes to layout), bay window options, variations in foundation wall heights, or window performance. Exterior materials and finishes can be changed provided there is no effect on insulation and other Energy Code requirements. Purely aesthetic characteristics like paint color or interior finishes can be customized to your preferences. Mirroring the floor plan is also allowed provided there are no changes to structural elements.
- Prepare a full site plan. To get a construction permit, an applicant must submit a complete plan set that shows the pre-approved plan on the site where it will be built. This allows SDCI staff 1) to confirm the design you're using matches the pre-approved plan on file, and 2) to complete review of zoning, foundation design, grading, electrical, fire, and, if applicable, drainage.
- Get a construction permit. In most cases, pre-approved plans offer a faster and more predictable permitting pathway for applicants. We estimate the following timelines for permit issuance provided the site where the pre-approved plan will be used does not have an ECA and the project does not involve tree removal:
 - For one- and two-unit structures subject to the SRC, two to six weeks
 - For structures subject to the SBC, four to eight weeks

You'll pay a reduced permit fee that reflects the time savings from less required review. You also benefit from the predictability that the structural design has already been reviewed and vetted. While typical projects often incur multiple correction cycles that delay construction, pre-approved plans have already been reviewed for structural code compliance, making corrections for this portion of the permit process less likely.

INFORMATION SESSION

A virtual information session will be held on Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. Interested participants can join via [this Teams link](#). We will post answers to questions raised at the information session on ADUniverse.