



CITY OF TACOMA  
**ACCESSORY DWELLING  
UNITS DESIGN GUIDE**

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A handbook for building accessory dwelling units in Tacoma





ADU in Tacoma, WA. Photo Credit: Lauren Flemister.

May 1, 2019

I am pleased to offer this guide to assist in understanding Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) standards, the permit process, and practical considerations. Navigating the permit and construction process can be complex, and people need information to make big decisions about their home and property. We look forward to helping you evaluate whether building an ADU makes sense for your household.

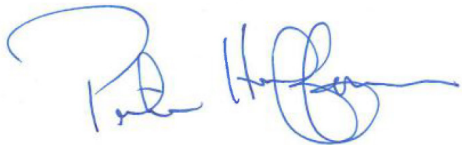
ADUs are intended to provide flexibility to homeowners, to increase the range of housing options and price points, and to fit with neighborhood patterns. Whether you are motivated by the desire for companionship, an income stream, housing a relative or caregiver, or other reasons, building an ADU may be a viable option.

ADUs are not a new concept. However, in most of Tacoma's neighborhoods, ADUs have been allowed only when attached to or within the main house. Over time, many people contacted the City to express interest in making ADUs more broadly available.

On March 18, 2019 the City Council adopted changes to Tacoma's ADU standards intended to do just that. One of the biggest changes was allowing Detached ADUs (backyard cottages) throughout our City's neighborhoods. In addition, the Council made updates intended to reduced barriers and streamline the permitting process.

The City also adopted land use and design standards to ensure that ADUs are well-built, fit with the scale of the neighborhood, continue yard patterns, and clearly accessory to the main house.

Moving forward, the City Council will revisit Tacoma's ADU standards to ensure that they are working as intended. This guide will be updated accordingly, and we will add further information as we learn more. We sincerely wish that ADUs will help meet both your household's needs, and the broader community's goals for a livable, sustainable and affordable city.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Huffman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "H".

Peter Huffman, Planning and Development Services Director



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This section provides an overview of the practical considerations in deciding whether and how to build an ADU. It includes a discussion of where ADUs are allowed and the things to consider with different types of ADUs. It also summarizes the City's permit review process.

## What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)?

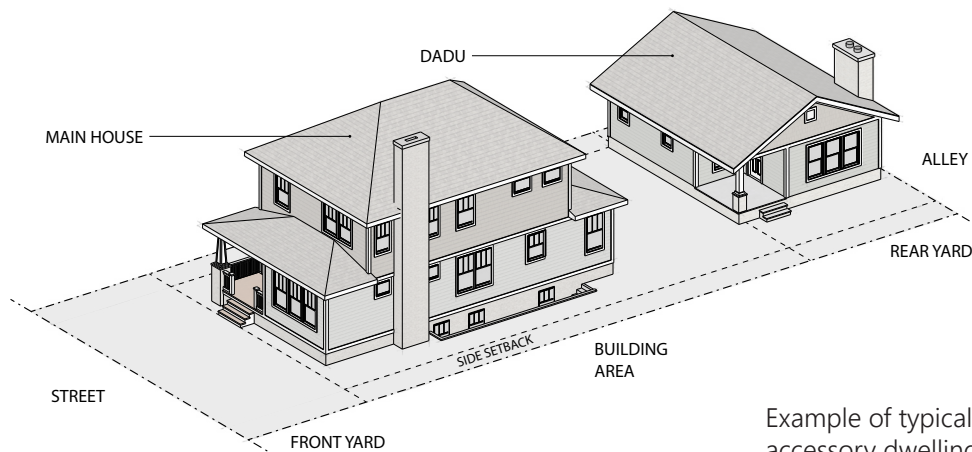
An ADU is a second, smaller dwelling unit located on the same lot as a single-family dwelling. ADUs are intended as a housing option that can contribute to housing affordability and choice, respond to changing household needs and lifestyles, add housing supply, and contribute to neighborhood stability, in a manner that is consistent with residential neighborhood patterns. ADUs can be located either within or attached to the primary residence, or in a detached structure in the rear yard. Both dwellings must be in single ownership. ADUs cannot be sold or owned separately from the main dwelling.

Accessory dwelling unit. A second subordinate dwelling unit located on the same lot as a single-family dwelling (hereinafter referred to as the "main dwelling") and either within the same building as the main dwelling or in a detached building, with a provision for independent cooking, living, sanitation, and sleeping (TMC 13.06.700)

## Where ADUs are allowed?

A few simple rules govern where ADUs are allowed within the City of Tacoma:

- ADUs are generally permitted in the same zoning districts that permit single-family development. Specifically, ADUs are permitted in all zoning districts, except shoreline districts and most industrial districts.
- There must be a house (single-family dwelling) on the parcel. ADUs are not allowed on vacant lots, with 2-family, 3-family, multifamily or with other land uses.
- Only one ADU is allowed per parcel.
- ADUs are allowed on all legally established parcels. There is no minimum lot size or width.
- ADUs must be designed and constructed to meet the applicable development standards.



Example of typical lot with detached accessory dwelling unit



## Types of ADUs

There are many ways to design and build ADUs. The options may be shaped by the existing structures, yard space, proximity of utilities, City regulations, and your personal objectives and budget. Deciding how to build your ADU affects construction cost as well as how you will inhabit and experience your house, the ADU, and yard.

There are two general types of ADUs—Attached and Detached.

Attached ADUs are located within or attached to the primary residence. An Attached ADU could be created entirely within the existing walls of your house (for example, as a basement or attic conversion). Or, an Attached ADU could involve an addition to the house (such as adding a story or extending the house into the rear yard).

Detached ADUs are separate structures located in the rear yard of the main dwelling. Detached ADUs could be constructed as a completely new structure. Or, the ADU could be a conversion and/or addition to an existing accessory structure (such as adding a second story to, or converting, a garage).

These variables affect the building, land use and utility regulations, scope of work, and budget.

## Legalization of unpermitted ADUs

The City is encouraging owners of existing, unpermitted ADUs to legalize them by obtaining permits. For a limited time, the City is offering flexibility on ADU standards (including size, height, setback and design) that would otherwise apply. To be eligible, the ADU and site must consist of:

- No more than one ADU per residential lot
- Be located within the main dwelling or as a detached structure in the rear yard
- Not exceed maximum occupancy under the Building Code
- Include facilities for cooking, living, sanitation, and sleeping
- Provide an address visible from the street
- Be consistent with the City's Home Occupation and Short-term Rental standards
- Meet the Minimum Housing Code standards set forth in Section 2.01 of the Building Code

Applications must be submitted by December 31, 2020 to receive this flexibility. After January 1, 2021, owners of illegal ADUs shall be subject to the enforcement provisions of TMC 13.05.100. and 13.02.01



Photo credit: Bob + Kenny Harris ADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>

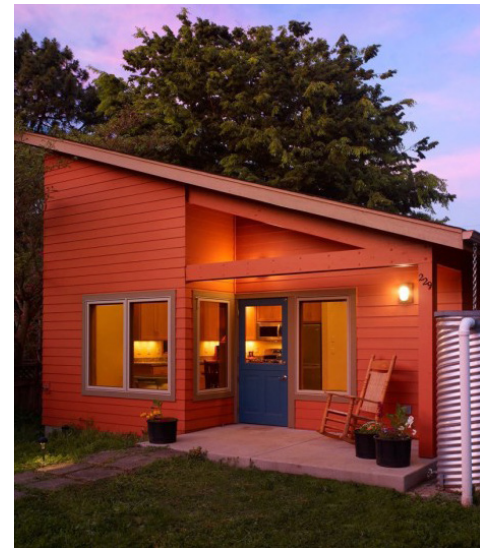


Photo Credit: Rainbow Valley Construction

Top: Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit  
Bottom: Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit

## Code Citations

This guide illustrates the most pertinent sections of the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC), including the following:

- TMC 13.06.150 Accessory dwelling units.
- TMC 13.06.100.D Residential districts - Lot size and building envelope standards.
- TMC 13.06.100.F Accessory building standards.
- TMC Title 2 Buildings.

Consult City staff to determine whether other standards apply. In the case of any conflict, the TMC language shall control.

## How to apply for an ADU

1. To start, prepare a Building Permit application. In addition, Site Development, Fire, Electrical, Water Plumbing and/or Mechanical permits may be required. There is no separate permit required for ADUs.
2. Online application: Submit permit applications online at [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org). Select the "Applying for Permits" tab, create an account, select the type of permit, complete the application process/questions and upload required documents.
3. In person application: Apply in person at Planning and Development Services (PDS), Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street – 3rd Floor, Tacoma WA.
4. If revisions are required, provide revised plans and include a written response to each comment that references the plan pages being revised. Then, upload the documents via the "submitting plan revisions" option or bring them in person to the PDS office.
5. Current plan review times can be accessed at [tacomapermits.org](http://tacomapermits.org).

## Submittal Documents

To apply for ADU permits, included the following (documents must be submitted per Tacoma's electronic file standards).

- Completed ADU submittal checklist.
- Written scope of work identifying the proposed work areas, ADU square footage, square footage of primary dwelling unit, height of detached ADU, location, cost/value of the work and, if a remodel, an itemized cost estimate.
- Site plan, drawn to scale, showing the existing and proposed buildings, building setbacks to property lines, distances between all structures, existing and proposed utilities, walking paths, existing and proposed parking, and new and existing impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003.
- Floor plans, drawn to scale, of existing building footprint and proposed primary and accessory dwelling units.
- A completed Building Permit application (ADU-BLDRN):
  - For new structures, review tip sheet for new single family dwellings combination permit.
  - For remodels or converted buildings, review tip sheet for remodels and additions.





## City permit and utility fees

The cost of permits depends on factors including the size of the new structure or addition, and/or cost of remodel/conversion associated with the (D)ADU, what utilities are included, and other factors. To obtain an estimation of permit fees associated with the project, the use of our Fee Estimator Tool is encouraged (available at [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org)). When calculating fees for the purpose of estimating permitting costs, be sure to combine costs of all associated permits. Please note that separate utility fees (through Tacoma Public Utilities) will also apply.

## For more information

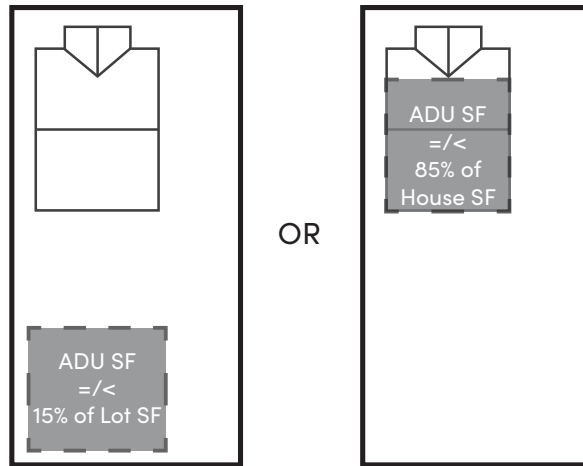
Contact Planning and Development Services at (253) 591-5030 or visit [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org).

This section summarizes land use and design standards that typically apply to ADUs. Building and utilities standards are addressed in Section 3. Consult City staff to determine whether other standards may apply.

## ADU Size

The size of ADUs (both Attached and Detached) is measured in habitable/living area. The habitable area of the ADU, excluding any non-living areas, is limited to the most restrictive of the following:

1. No more than 15% of the lot area.
2. No more than 85% of the living area of the primary structure or dwelling.
3. No more than 1,000 square feet.



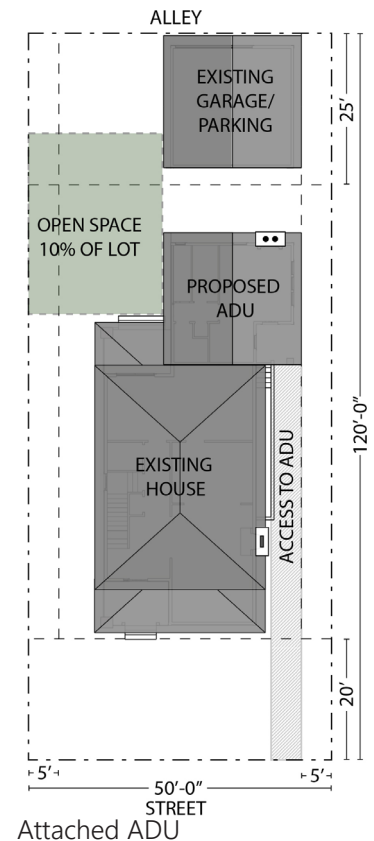
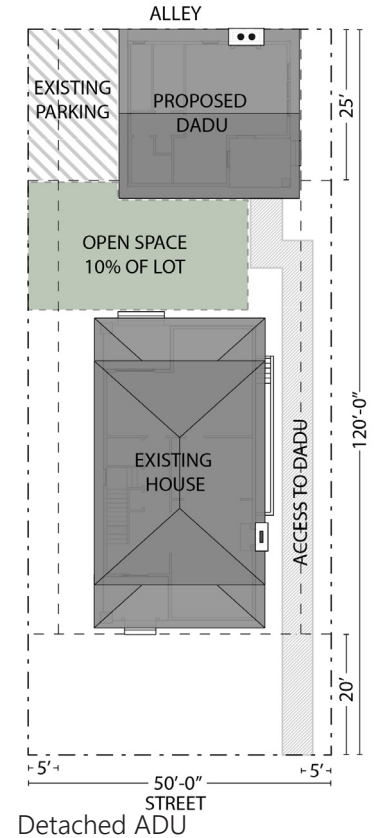
NOTE: Detached ADUs are considered a type of accessory structure under Tacoma's code. However, ADU size is calculated differently than other types of accessory structures. For sites with more than one accessory structure, if one of them is a Detached ADU, an additional 500 square feet may be added to the total square footage of accessory structure footprints. This does not increase the permitted size of the ADU. For more information, see TMC 13.06.100.F.

## Setbacks & location.

Attached ADUs are part of the primary structure and are subject to the primary structure setbacks.

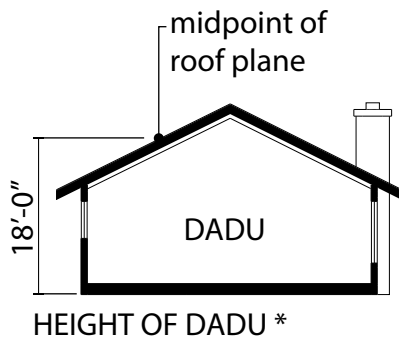
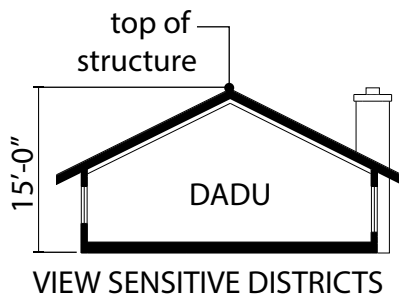
Setbacks are different in different zoning districts. In the R-2 District, the most common residential district, primary structure setbacks (measured from property lines) are:

- Front: 20 feet
- Side: 5 feet
- Rear: 25 feet, measured from the mid-point of an alley, if present
- Contact Tacoma Permits to learn the setbacks in your location



Detached ADUs must be located as follows:

- On the same lot as the primary structure.
- In the rear yard (behind the rear wall) of the primary structure.
- A minimum of 5 feet from side and rear property lines, except no setback is required from alleys.
- Meet fire separation standards, per the Building Code, in one of the following ways.
  - Provide a minimum 10 foot separation between the ADU and any other structure; or,
  - If closer than 10 feet, fire separation rated construction will be required, per standards.



## ADU Height

Attached ADUs are part of the primary structure, and are subject to the primary structure height limits. In most residential districts, the maximum height is 35 feet, measured to the midpoint of the roof. In View Sensitive

Districts, the maximum height is 25 feet, measured to the peak of the roof. Detached ADUs shall be no taller than the main house and the most restrictive of the following:

- Up to 18 feet measured to the midpoint of a peaked roof.
- Up to 20 feet with incorporation of parking, or with Built Green 4 stars (or equivalent) environmental certification.
- Conversion of an existing accessory structure taller than 18 feet may be considered as a Conditional Use.
- In View Sensitive Districts, the maximum height is 15 feet to the peak of the roof (measured per TMC 13.06.700.B). Additional height, if proposed, would be considered subject to TMC 13.06.645 variance criteria.

## Parking

Parking is not required for ADUs. If parking is proposed, it must be located in and accessed from the rear portion of the lot. The addition of an ADU may not remove parking required for the primary dwelling (typically, two stalls are required for the main house).

ADU Hight Requirements  
 \* When parking is incorporated the Structure can be up to 20'



## Design Standards for all ADUs

Both attached and detached ADUs are required to meet the following standards.

1. Design all facades to respond to the conditions of the site
2. Locate the ADU to minimize the visual prominence of the structure and its contrast to the main house
3. Select materials and details to withstand weather/wear regardless of architectural style
4. Meet applicable Historic District design standards. Historic review is required for development activities in historic districts designated by the City of Tacoma. For more information, visit [www.cityoftacoma.org/historicpreservation](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/historicpreservation).
5. ADU's must be designed to fit in with the fabric of the neighborhood by either option A or option B as described below

### OPTION

## A

Generally matching the exterior architectural style, appearance and character of the main house with similar materials, window, facade and roof design; or



Photo credit: Candace Kramer DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>

Objective: demonstrate clear relationship with main structure or neighborhood.

To meet the criteria for 1-A, the ADU design must demonstrate that it is visually secondary to the existing house; it has the same window and door patterns, scale and orientation; the same finishes, materials, material application, detail and quality; and the same pitch, materials and details for the roof.

### Example (photos):

Photos: Both DADU's match the roof details, materials, and pitch of the main house. Though other features of the DADU have subtle differences, the consistency of the two structure make them good examples that appears to satisfy the requirements of 1-A.

**OPTION****B**

Complement the main house through use of materials and design of equal or better quality generally matching the exterior architectural style, appearance and character of the main house with similar materials, window, facade and roof design

**Complement Main House:**

The City will conduct an administrative review to determine if the design *complements* the primary home. The criteria for this review is as follows. All projects must show compliance with (at minimum) Visual Hierarchy and two of the three listed other criteria (Facade, Windows + Doors, Roof);

**Visual Hierarchy:**

ADU's will be required to appear secondary to the main house and generally consistent with the existing neighborhood pattern by following these criteria:

- Organize the massing of the ADU to mitigate visual impact
- Blend with existing structure if attached

**Facade:**

Objective: demonstrate clear relationship with main structure or neighborhood through:

- Relationship between finishes (e.g. same color)
- Relationship between materials (e.g. both wood)
- Relationship between application (e.g. both lapped)

**Windows + Doors:**

Objective: demonstrate clear relationship with main structure or neighborhood through:

- Relationship between patterns (e.g. divided lite)
- Relationship of scale (e.g. same size or proportion)
- Relationship of orientation (e.g. portrait v. landscape)

**Roof:**

Objective: demonstrate clear relationship with main structure or neighborhood:

- Relationship between pitches (e.g. both 2:12)
- Relationship between materials (e.g. wood shingle) Relationship between details (e.g. rafter tails, gable braces)

# PHOTOS



Photo credit: Kendra and Victor Duong DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>



Photo credit: Bob and Kenny Harris ADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>

## Windows and Doors

Photos: (left) the DADU's windows and doors are not consistent with the house. For example, the action of the windows, the material they are constructed from, and their orientation are not consistent. (right) though not the same, the windows on the ADU have the same divided lite pattern as the house



Photo credit: Stew Hulick DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>



Photo credit: Bruce DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>

## Roofs

Photos: (left) The DADU matches the roof details, materials, and pitch though other features of the DADU are clearly different. (right, two photos) the main house is a pitched roof and the DADU is constructed with a parapet to have no appearance of roof pitch.



Photo credit: Constructive Form ADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>



Photo credit: Asmund & Jenny's DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>

## Visual Hierarchy

(left) the ADU uses colors consistent with the primary structure but the location, size, and window patterns make it stand out from the main house. (right) The DADU is set back from the main house and incorporates the garage. It also uses consistent materials and roof pitch to minimize the visual impact of the DADU.



Photo credit: Rambo Halpern DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>



Photo credit: Natalie Strom+Justin Strom DADU, <https://accessorydwellings.org>

## Facade

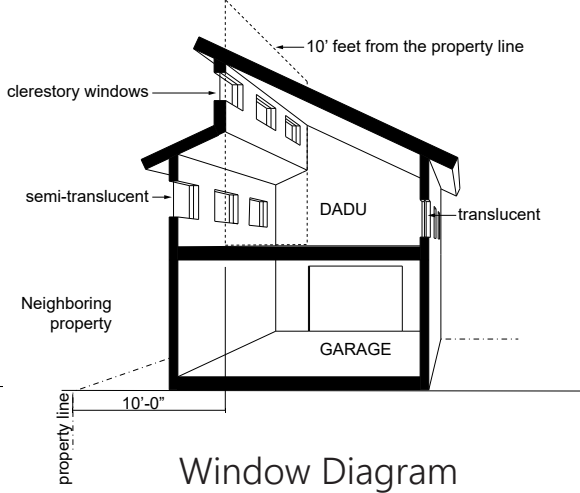
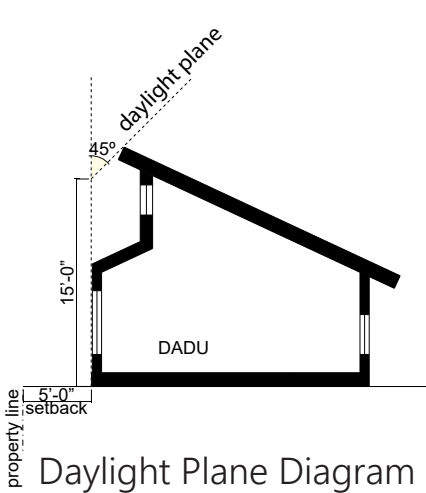
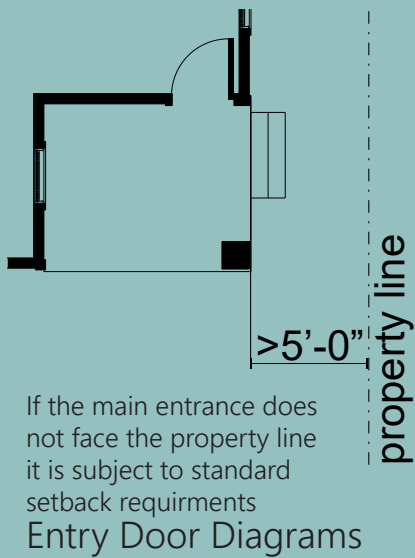
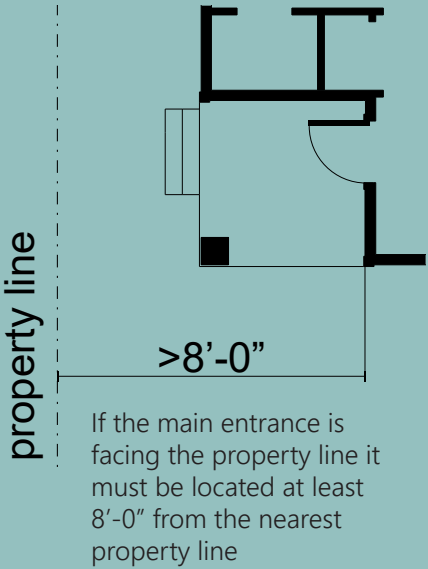
Photos: (left) The DADU uses material, color, and details to appear significantly consistent with the primary home. (right) The facades of the ADU and the Primary home have no clear relationship. The fenestration patterns are dissimilar, the materials are applied in a dissimilar way, and the materials don't appear to match

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### Design Standards for Detached ADUs

Detached ADUs are also required to meet the following standards.

- Main entrances must be at least 8 feet from side property lines shared with a neighbor, if the entrance faces the neighboring property.
- Second-story windows within 10 feet of the property line shall be constructed to reduce direct views into the neighboring property. Methods to do so include clerestory windows and semi-translucent glass.
- The structure shall not intercept a 45-degree daylight plane inclined into the site from a height of 15 feet above existing grade from the 5-foot setback line.



### Open Space

The overall site must maintain or provide at least 10% of the lot size as usable and functional yard space (per TMC 13.06.100.D.7).

### Walkways

For ADUs with a separate entrance, a walkway must connect to the nearest public sidewalk or right-of-way.

- Walkways must be a minimum of 3 feet wide.
- Walkway materials must be distinct from any adjacent vehicular areas (walkways may function as a shared drive/walk space along an exterior edge of a driving surface).

### Addressing

ADUs must have clear addressing visible from the street. If the ADU is not visible from the street, an address and some form of directional

notation must be along a walkway, on a fence, on the main house, or some location that differentiates the main house address from the ADU address and is visible from the main access point to the property.

## Detached ADUs and other Accessory Structures

Detached ADUs are considered accessory structures (per TMC 13.06.100.F). Other kinds of accessory structures include garages and sheds. There are several differences in standards for Detached ADUs and other accessory structures:

- Detached ADU size is calculated differently than other types of accessory structures (see ADU Size).
- Only Detached ADUs are permitted to contain habitable space. Plumbing is not permitted in an accessory building without a finding by the Building Official that such plumbing will not permit the accessory building to be utilized as habitable space.
- For sites with more than one accessory structure, if one of them is a Detached ADU, an additional 500 square feet may be added to the total square footage of accessory structure footprints. This does not increase the permitted size of the ADU. The following accessory structures standards apply to Detached ADUs:
- Detached accessory buildings located on corner lots shall provide the main building side yard setback along the corner side property line.
- Detached accessory buildings shall be located on the same lot or parcel on which the main building is situated.
- For through lots, if there is an established pattern of “functional front and rear yards,” detached accessory buildings shall be allowed in the “functional rear yard.”
- For garages that include vehicular doors facing the front property line, the building or portion of the building with such doors shall be setback at least 20 feet from the front property line or private road easement.
- Commercial shipping and/or storage containers shall not be a permitted type of accessory building in any residential zoning district.

## Home Occupations

Home occupations (businesses) are allowed, subject to regulations. If both the main dwelling and the ADU contain home occupations, only one of the two is permitted to receive customers on the premises.

## Rentals

One or both of the dwellings may be rentals, subject to the rental code and licensing requirements. If one of the dwellings is used as a short-term rental, the property owner is required to occupy the other dwelling.





## Building and Utility Standards

This section addresses common building and utility standards for different types of ADUs. Land use and design considerations are summarized in Section 2. There are differences for Attached versus Detached ADUs, and for new construction versus conversion/addition to existing structures. For further information, contact PDS at (253) 591-5030 or visit [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org).

### Construction Requirements for All ADUs

**General:** Accessory dwelling units must comply with construction codes including, but not limited to: International Residential Code (IRC) with City and State adopted amendments, Washington State Energy Code (WSEC), Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC), and City of Tacoma Minimum Housing and Structures Code, Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 2.01, and other applicable codes

**Design Loads:** All structures must show compliance with the IRC. The vertical and lateral loads must show compliance with prescriptive IRC requirements with loads transferring from the roof through the foundation. If the work does not meet prescriptive IRC requirements, then design by an engineer licensed in the State of Washington meeting International Building Code requirements is necessary.

**Fire Separation Design:** The location of an ADU must comply with separation distance requirements per the IRC R302. The distance between two detached structures must be identified. If the distance between the dwelling unit walls and eaves is less than 10 feet, then fire-rated design is required per IRC Table R302.1(1) or R302.1(2). These Tables also addresses opening limitations and eave projections. In addition, if any part of the structure is within 5 feet of the adjacent property line, then fire rating must be addressed per the Tables. Attached ADUs are to be constructed to duplex standards with fire separation between the units and at supporting walls consistent with IRC R302.3.

**Living Space:** Units must have a kitchen with a sink, cooking facilities, and food preparation area. Units must have permanent heating, hot water, and habitable rooms meeting a minimum 7 feet width with 70 square feet area. The ceiling height must be 7 feet minimum. Bathroom facilities are required with sink, toilet, and shower or bathtub. Plumbing fixtures shall have clearances per IRC R307. Ventilation exhaust fans at bathrooms, kitchen, laundry, and whole house must be identified per IRC section M1507 and associated State Amendments.

**Safety:** The work must meet IRC Chapter 3 for safety, including, but not limited to:

- The studio living space or bedroom area shall not directly access from the garage area per IRC R302.5.1.
- Windows within 2 feet of doors and at bathrooms must provide safety glazing per IRC R308.
- Bedrooms and sleeping areas shall have emergency escape openings meeting IRC R310: 5.7 square feet with minimum width of 20" and minimum height of 24".
- The entry door must be 32" wide with the door in the open position and clear height not less than 78". There shall be a landing on each side of the door that is the width of the door and minimum 36" in direction of travel per IRC R311.
- Fall protection is required per IRC R312 if a window is less than 24" above the floor and over 72" above exterior adjacent grade.

- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors shall be interconnected with battery back-up per IRC and State Amendments sections R314 and R315.

**Energy:** The unit must fully comply with WSEC requirements. Insulation, glazing U-value, and door requirements must be consistent with WSEC Table R402.1.1 and must be clearly identified on the plans and glazing shedule. The new dwelling area must comply with the additional energy credit requiremets of WSEC section R406.2, Link: WSEC Energy Credits . If efficient fixtures are proposed for compliance with the energy credits, then they must be identified on the floor plans and, if they will be exterior to the structure, on site plans. A minimum of 75% of lamps in permanently installed lighting fixtures shall be high-efficacy lamps. Please note per WSEC R403.7.1 that electric resistance zone heated units in dwellings and using electric zonal heating (baseboard, Cadet, etc.) as the primary heat source shall install an inverter-driven ductless mini-split heat pump in the largest zone in the dwelling. Building permit drawings shall specify the heating equipment type and location of the heating system. The exception to this requirement is if you can show the total installed heating capacity of 2 kW per dwelling unit or less.

**Manufactured Homes** must meet vertical and lateral loads including seismic, snow, and wind that are evaluated by an engineer licensed in the State of Washington. Manufactured structures must meet Tacoma Municipal Code 2.02.620 and be new, double wide with sections 12 feet wide by 36 feet long, have minimum 3/12 roof pitch, have siding materials commonly used on conventional site-built single family residences, have skirting under the structures or concrete foundations, and meet WSEC.

**Modular Homes** must meet IRC requirements with City and State Amendments at time of submittal. See related tip sheet for clarity on the differences of manufactured and modular buildings.

**Fire Sprinkler** system may be necessary for any dwelling with points on exterior walls more than 150 feet from the nearest fire apparatus access road. In addition, fire sprinkler systems for any dwelling with points on exterior walls more than 600 feet from the nearest fire hydrant.  
A roadway less than 20' wide and alleys are not considered access roads.

## Specific Requirements for Converting Existing Space/Building to ADU

**General:** The space being converted must be evaluated for existing legal heated habitable space.

If the space was not existing legal heated living space, then the area must come into full compliance with active codes at the time of submittal for previously identified Design, Fire Separation, Living Space, Safety, Energy, and any other requirements for new living space at an existing building.

If the space was existing legal heated living space, then any modifications to the space must come into compliance with active codes at time of submittal.

**Common considerations:** Plans for conversions must address these common issues, if applicable:

- Plans must address the increase of live loads from storage to habitable space.
- Garages being converted to living space require that the vehicle openings be properly infilled and addressing earth-wood separation per IRC R317. The separation usually consists of constructing a reinforced concrete curb with anchor bolts meeting IRC foundation and wall requirements or by removing exterior grade to provide separation and proper sloping to prevent moisture from collecting at the foundation. The garage vehicle door needs to be removed and replaced



with weather resistant siding of consistent materials to primary structure, insulation, breathable moisture barriers, and interior finishes.

- Opening in-fill above the foundation stem wall requires siding material, breathable moisture barrier, sheathing, insulation and interior finish all meeting IRC requirements.
- For basements being converted to ADU living space, applicants should review the Basement Tip Sheet and address exterior wall drainage and wall exterior waterproofing per IRC R405 and IRC R406. As an alternative, the drawings can mitigate moisture by showing roof drainage being collected and directed down to vegetated yard space or other approved location that is identified on a site plan, grades adjacent to foundations shall be sloped away at 6" vertically at 10', and there shall be no evidence of past moisture issues including sump pumps, interior drainage, or wall/floor staining. The submittal must provide wall section details that indicate exterior moisture protection system or provide details and site plan with discharge locations per the alternative method described.

### Specific Standards for Attached ADUs

Attached ADUs should be constructed to duplex standards with fire separation between the units and at the supporting structure per IRC R302.3.

An applicant may consider an alternative to duplex construction standards if documentation is provided that meets all 3 criteria below per Washington State Amendments to the IRC:

- 1) The accessory dwelling unit is constructed within an existing dwelling unit. This requires the unit to have connection with enclosed spaces and provide the appearance as one common house.
- 2) Either the accessory dwelling unit or primary dwelling unit is owner-occupied. This will require recording on title of an owner occupancy agreement to assure proper use now and with potential future ownership.
- 3) All required smoke alarms in the accessory dwelling unit and the primary dwelling unit are interconnected in such a manner that the actuation of one alarm will activate all alarms in both the primary dwelling unit and the accessory dwelling unit.

If an existing ADU is modified to not be owner occupied, then permits are required to modify and/or verify construction meets duplex standards referenced previously.

### Legalization of nonconforming ADUs

Nonconforming ADUs existing prior to the enactment of these requirements may be found to be legal if the property owner applies for an ADU building permit prior to December 31, 2020, and brings the unit up to Minimum Housing Code standards set forth in Section 2.01 of the Building Code. In addition, all nonconforming ADUs must meet all of the standards within Subsection C Requirements, as well as Subsection D.4 Location. After January 1, 2021, owners of illegal ADUs shall be subject to the enforcement provisions of TMC 13.05.100. The burden of proof falls on property owners in any dispute regarding the legality of the unit.

Minimum Housing Code TMC 2.01.030 section A requires additions or alterations to be consistent to the Building Codes. The applicant must provide documentation outlining the conversion to the ADU with scope of work, floor plans, framing plans, section views, details, possibly engineering, and other

clarifying documents that shows the work meets code requirements when permitted. If unpermitted, then it will be evaluated on an individual basis based on historic information available, information presented by the applicant, and drawings submitted. Any work identified that requires a permit shall be obtained and inspected to current code requirements.

### **Subdividing property with a Detached ADU**

A detached ADU may remain on a lot or parcel where no main building exists: (1) in the event the main structure on a lot is damaged or for other reason, is required to be removed; or (2) if the property is subdivided in such a manner that the detached ADU would be located on a separate building site. In either case, a building permit for construction of a main structure shall be required to be obtained within one year of removal or division of property and substantial construction completed in accordance with the plans for which the permit was authorized.

If a property with an existing single family dwelling and an ADU is subdivided with a result that the ADU is on a separate property, then the ADU must either be converted to single family dwelling per Land Use and Site Improvement standards and subject to separate utility services and may include frontage improvements for the change of use, or permits for construction of a new single-family dwelling on the ADU site must be submitted.

## Utilities for ADUs

**General:** Utility lines and impervious surface areas must be identified on a separate utility plan. For more info, visit [www.tacomapublicutilities.com](http://www.tacomapublicutilities.com).

**Site Development** considers detached and attached ADUs to be accessory structures and right-of-way improvements are only necessary to address impacts created by the development. Requirements may include restoration for new or upgraded utilities, modifications to driveway or curb access if proposed, or associated construction damage. Future conversions or change of use to a primary residence will trigger street frontage improvements through Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 2.19.

**Sanitary Sewer** services may be connected to existing primary dwelling sewer if adequate load and design is available. A side sewer permit is necessary for impacts and/or modifications to the exterior sewer lines of the structures. Sanitary sewer service must comply with the City of Tacoma Side Sewer Manual. Sewer line may be connected to existing on-site lines if existing lines are adequate. Sewer service must have 10 foot horizontal separation from water service and be 18" lower than water service. If minimum separation distances cannot be met then they shall be designed in accordance with the Department of Ecology's Criteria for Sewage Works design, Section C1-9. Storm water and Sanitary Sewer 253-591-5760 <http://tacomapermits.org/sanitary-sewer-stormwater-library>

**Surface Water** must be addressed for impervious surfaces if over 2,000 square feet since January 1, 2003 per the Stormwater Management Manual. Also, drainage shall not discharge to adjacent properties. Stormwater and impervious surfaces shall be addressed per Storm Water Design Manual. New impervious surfaces and structure area exceeding 2,000 square feet since January 1, 2003 must be addressed through Storm Water Site Plan (SSP form) and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPP).

**Electrical** service requirements are provided through Tacoma Power. They can be reached at (253) 502-8436. It is highly recommended to contact Tacoma Power during the design process to understand potential conflicts of service that may require pole or service relocations. Please note that new ADUs will be required to have a separate meter installed. No sub paneling will be allowed. Water service metering requirements are provided Tacoma Water. They can be reached at (253) 502-8247. It is highly

recommended to contact Tacoma Water to understand potential water meter service requirements and additional dwelling service fees. Meter sizing may be impacted by requirements for fire sprinkler systems and distances. During the submittal, provide existing water service line sizing and proposed line sizing to the new structure to verify adequate service. See separation requirements detailed in the Sanitary Sewer section previously identified. Tacoma Power (253) 502-8436 <https://www.mytpu.org/building-remodeling/permits/electrical-permitting/>

**Garbage/Recycling Solid Waste:** Contact Solid Waste at 253-502-2100 for solid waste service requirements. Solid waste service is required for all occupied residences in the City of Tacoma and must comply with provisions as stated in TMC 12.09. Solid Waste Management reserves the right to establish the appropriate level of service. Properties that increase dwelling unit counts to three or more living units are subject to applicable rate category and billing class changes. Solid Waste <https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=60729>

**Other Services:** Utilities including natural gas and cable television should be coordinated with those independent service providers separately. Gas service modifications require separate review and permitting. Tacoma Water 253-502-8247 <https://www.mytpu.org/building-remodeling/permits/> 253-502-8247.



Ballard ADU in Seattle, WA. Photo Credit: Cast Architecture.



Submittal Checklist for:  
**Attached/Detached ADU Conversion or ADU Addition to House**

This checklist may be used as a guide for basic requirements to prepare an application. Submittal of additional plans or information may be required to complete a building review, and/or review for shoreline or historic properties, critical areas, and those that require geotechnical analysis due to steep slopes or unstable soils. If you'd like to find out whether these items could apply, please contact us at (253) 591-5030. **Also see [Drawings: Site Plans, Floor Plans, and Elevations](#).**

| Property Information  |                        |                  |    |
|---|------------------------|------------------|----|
| Site Address:   |                        | Parcel No.:      |    |
|   |                        | Estimated Value: | \$ |
| Provided  | Submittal Requirements |                  |    |
| <p><b>NOTE: All drawings must be in <u>one</u> PDF file named "Drawings". Your "Drawings" PDF is a required attachment to your building permit application.</b> Drawings must include sheets for Site Plan, Utility Plan, Floor Plans, Framing Plans, Roof Plans, Elevations, Section Plans, and Foundation Details as described below.</p> |                        |                  |    |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>REQUIRED QUESTIONS:</b></p> <p>Type of ADU: <input type="checkbox"/> Attached ADU Conversion, <input type="checkbox"/> Detached ADU Conversion, <input type="checkbox"/> ADU Addition to House</p> <p>ADU Size: _____ sq ft, Main Dwelling Size(w/o ADU) _____ sq ft, ADU Height: _____ ft</p> <p>Owner Occupy? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No, Existing Parking stall # _____ Removed Parking # _____</p> <p>Renting?: <input type="checkbox"/> House / <input type="checkbox"/> ADU / <input type="checkbox"/> Both, Rental Price House\$ _____ ADU \$ _____</p>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Site Plan</b> that shows the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> North arrow with property lines and corners and dimensions of parcel,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Building footprints with dimensions and setback from property lines and other buildings on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Legend describing details and/or plan symbols and identify adjacent streets and alleys,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Open space detailed with calculations. (TMC 13.06.100.D.7 <i>Minimum Usable Yard Space</i>)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Foot print square footage of house and ADU</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Driveways and parking areas with dimensions, existing/proposed gravel or paving area</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Address signage location identified that is visible from the street for house and ADU.</li> </ul> |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Floor plans</b> drawn to scale for all levels of the house and ADU with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dimensions and use of each room (existing and proposed)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing fixture location (basement fixtures may need backwater valves)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation for the new dwelling unit being created including whole house, bathroom, laundry, kitchen, etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Location of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Location of all windows and doors with dimensions and shear wall/brace wall locations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> For garages being converted to living space, provide section view showing garage vehicle door infill</li> </ul>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Framing plans</b> for floors, roof, walls which specify size &amp; spacing of framing, beams, headers, etc. Either provide engineering calculations addressing vertical and lateral loads, or show compliance with prescriptive requirements of the adopted International Residential Code.</p>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Roof plans</b> – peaks, valleys, overhangs with dimensions, if modifications to roof proposed.</p>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Elevations</b> drawings including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Labeled "looking north", " looking south", " looking east", and " looking west"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Height of the structures with roof pitch of house and ADU</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Specify trim and siding materials on house and ADU</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Location of all windows and doors with dimensions for house and ADU</li> </ul>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Section plans</b> and connection details including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Detail compliance with energy code insulation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify load path from roof to foundation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify ceiling heights of each level, especially at basements and bathroom fixtures with sloped ceilings</li> </ul>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p>Foundation details that show live and dead loads are adequately supported with footings, reinforcement, anchorage, and materials.</p>   |
| <p><b>All items listed above must be combined into <u>one</u> PDF attachment. PDF file name: Drawings</b></p> |  |

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p><b>Utility plan</b> that shows the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Property lines and corners with dimensions of parcel and adjacent streets and alleys,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sewer line existing and proposed with distances from property lines and structures on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Water lines existing and proposed with distances from property lines and structures on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Electrical service lines existing and proposed with distances to structures on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Garbage can locations on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Storm Water evaluation requires calculations for all impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003. This includes new structure footprint, concrete pathways, driveways being installed, and other impervious surfaces.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other utility locations. Like gas service, if applicable.</li> </ul> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p><b>Energy</b> meeting Washington State Energy Code requirements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Additional energy credits,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Insulation at walls, ceiling, floor, slab and slab edges,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Glazing U-values.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Electric resistance heating will require inverter-driven ductless mini-split system heatpump in the largest zone of ADU. This is not required if it can be shown the heating capacity of 2kW or less for the ADU.</li> </ul> <p>Additional energy code information is available online here: <a href="#">Energy</a><br/> <b>PDF file name: Energy Code Forms</b></p>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p><b>Stormwater Site Plan (SSP)</b>, if more than 2,000 sq ft of new impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003 or grading more than 50 cubic yards. <b>PDF file name: SSP</b></p>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p><b>Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP)</b>, if more than 2,000 sq ft of new impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003 or grading more than 50 cubic yards. <b>PDF file name same: SWPPP</b></p>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p><b>Fire Separation</b> details.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One hour fire rated separation between the two attached dwelling units.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One hour fire rated walls required at supporting structure, unless automatic fire sprinkler system installed.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Listed fire rated assembly and opening limitations are required for structures within 10 feet.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Listed fire rated assembly and opening limitations are required within 5 feet of property line.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If approved owner occupy agreement is completed and interconnected smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are installed, then an attached ADU will not require fire separation between the units or supporting structure.</li> </ul>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p><b>Other</b> common items include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> For amnesty of existing ADU per TMC 13.06.____, provide: past permits, supporting historical evidence, and plans note for permit determination. This should be submitted as a detached/attached conversion.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reports identified by staff which may include geotechnical report, height survey, wetland report, historical approval, variance, or other decision or determination.</li> </ul>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Provide itemized materials list and labor costs for verification of estimated values   |

**Notes**

**You may apply for an Attached ADU Conversion, Detached ADU Conversion, or ADU Addition to Existing House as a Residential Building Alteration Permit online at <https://aca.accela.com/tacoma/>.**

Instructions: Once you've registered online, login and select Permits to submit an application for *Residential Alteration*. All submittal requirements must be attached to your application as PDF's labeled as noted above, **flattened and unprotected, except that stormwater modeling files may be submitted in their native formats (e.g. .whm, .wh2, .mgs)**.  
 If you need assistance or are unable to submit online, please contact us at (253) 591-5030.

**For electrical and water meter permits, contact Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) [www.mytpu.org](http://www.mytpu.org).**

*Note: This checklist does not substitute for codes and regulations. The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.*

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**  
 To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).  
 TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.



Submittal Checklist for:  
**New Building with Detached ADU or New SFD with Attached ADU**

This checklist may be used as a guide for basic requirements to prepare an application. Submittal of additional plans or information may be required to complete a building review, and/or review for shoreline or historic properties, critical areas, and those that require geotechnical analysis due to steep slopes or unstable soils. If you'd like to find out whether these items could apply, please contact us at (253) 591-5030. **Also see [Drawings: Site Plans, Floor Plans, and Elevations](#).**

| Property Information   |                               |             |                     |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Site Address:  |                               | Parcel No.: | Estimated Value: \$ |
| <b>Provided</b>  | <b>Submittal Requirements</b> |             |                     |
| <b>NOTE: All drawings must be in <u>one</u> PDF file named "Drawings". Your "Drawings" PDF is a required attachment to your building permit application.</b> Drawings must include sheets for Site Plan, Utility Plan, Floor Plans, Framing Plans, Roof Plans, Elevations, Section Plans, and Foundation Details as described below. |                               |             |                     |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>REQUIRED QUESTIONS:</b> Type of ADU: <input type="checkbox"/> New Detached ADU Building, <input type="checkbox"/> New SFD with Attached ADU<br>ADU Size: _____ sq ft, Main Dwelling Size(w/o ADU) _____ sq ft, ADU Height: _____ ft<br>Owner Occupy? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No, Existing Parking stall # _____ Removed Parking # _____<br>Renting?: <input type="checkbox"/> House / <input type="checkbox"/> ADU / <input type="checkbox"/> Both, Rental Price House\$ _____ ADU \$ _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>Site Plan</b> that shows the following:<br><input type="checkbox"/> North arrow with property lines and corners and dimensions of parcel,<br><input type="checkbox"/> Building footprints with dimensions and setback from property lines and other buildings on the property,<br><input type="checkbox"/> Legend describing details and/or plan symbols and identify adjacent streets and alleys,<br><input type="checkbox"/> Open space detailed with calculations. (TMC 13.06.100.D.7 <i>Minimum Usable Yard Space</i> )<br><input type="checkbox"/> Foot print square footage of house and ADU<br><input type="checkbox"/> Driveways and parking areas with dimensions, existing/proposed gravel or paving area<br><input type="checkbox"/> Address signage location identified that is visible from the street for house and ADU. |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>Floor plans</b> drawn to scale for all levels of the house and ADU with the following:<br><input type="checkbox"/> Dimensions and use of each room (existing and proposed)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing fixture location (basement fixtures may need backwater valves)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Kitchen location and exhaust fan venting outside for new ADU<br><input type="checkbox"/> Whole house ventilation for the new dwelling unit being created<br><input type="checkbox"/> Location of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors<br><input type="checkbox"/> Location of all windows and doors with dimensions and shear wall/brace wall locations.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>Framing plans</b> for floors, roof, walls which specify size & spacing of framing, beams, headers, etc.<br>Either provide engineering calculations addressing vertical and lateral loads, or show compliance with prescriptive requirements of the adopted International Residential Code.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>Roof plans</b> – peaks, valleys, overhangs with dimensions, if modifications to roof proposed.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>Elevations</b> drawings including the following:<br><input type="checkbox"/> Labeled "looking north", " looking south", " looking east", and " looking west"<br><input type="checkbox"/> Height of the structure<br><input type="checkbox"/> Roof pitch of house and ADU<br><input type="checkbox"/> Specify trim and siding materials on house and ADU<br><input type="checkbox"/> Location of all windows and doors with dimensions for house and ADU  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>Section plans</b> and connection details including the following:<br><input type="checkbox"/> Detail compliance with energy code insulation<br><input type="checkbox"/> Identify ceiling heights of each level, especially at basements and bathroom fixtures with sloped ceilings   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Foundation details that show live and dead loads are adequately supported with footing dimensions, depth, reinforcement, anchorage, and materials.  |
| <b>All items listed above must be combined into <u>one</u> PDF attachment. PDF file name: Drawings</b> |   |



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Utility plan</b> that shows the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Property lines and corners with dimensions of parcel and adjacent streets and alleys,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sewer line existing and proposed with distances from property lines and structures on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Water lines existing and proposed with distances from property lines and structures on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Electrical service lines existing and proposed with distances to structures on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Garbage can locations on the property,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Storm Water evaluation requires calculations for all impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003. This includes new structure footprint, concrete pathways, driveways being installed, and other impervious surfaces.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other utility locations. Like gas service, if applicable.</li> </ul> |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p><b>Energy</b> meeting Washington State Energy Code requirements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Additional energy credits,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Insulation at walls, ceiling, floor, slab and slab edges,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Glazing U-values.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Electric resistance heating will require inverter-driven ductless mini-split system heatpump in the largest zone of ADU. This is not required if it can be shown the heating capacity of 2kW or less for the ADU. Additional energy code information is available online here: <a href="#">Energy</a></li> </ul> <p><b>PDF file name: Energy Code Forms</b></p>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p>Stormwater Site Plan (SSP), if more than 2,000 sq ft of new impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003 or grading more than 50 cubic yards.. <b>PDF file name: SSP</b></p>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p>Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), if more than 2,000 sq ft of new impervious surfaces since January 1, 2003 or grading more than 50 cubic yards. <b>PDF file name same: SWPPP</b></p>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <p>Other items identified by staff, which may include geotechnical report, height survey, wetland report, historical approval, variance, or other decision or determination.</p>   |
| <p><b>Notes</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b>You may apply for an ADU New Residential Building Permit (BLDRN) online at <a href="https://aca.accela.com/tacoma/">https://aca.accela.com/tacoma/</a>.</b><br/> Instructions: Once you've registered online, login and select <u>Permits</u> to submit an application for <i>Residential New Building</i>. All submittal requirements must be attached to your application as PDF's labeled as noted above, <b><u>flattened and unprotected</u></b>, <b>except that stormwater modeling files may be submitted in their native formats (e.g. .whm, .wh2, .mgs)</b>.<br/> If you need assistance or are unable to submit online, please contact us at (253) 591-5030.<br/> <b>For electrical permits, contact Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) <a href="http://www.mytpu.org">www.mytpu.org</a>.</b></p> |  |

*Note: This checklist does not substitute for codes and regulations.  
The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.*

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**  
To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).  
TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.