



**Accessory Dwelling Unit
Code Requirements**
effective July 1, 2004

This guideline is intended to assist you in determining the feasibility of creating or establishing an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU). It is not intended to cover all situations or code requirements, nor is it meant to be the preferred or recommended option for you. Wherever possible, code references are provided.

What is an ADU? An Accessory Dwelling Unit is a separate living unit that is either inside, attached to, or detached from the primary home on the property.

Land Use Code Issues: Contact your local planning or land use department for approval of site-specific requirements prior to any discussion regarding building code issues. Creating an ADU will be similar to remodeling or adding onto your home. Permits are required prior to the start of any work. The participating cities of MyBuildingPermit.com have co-sponsored, in partnership with A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), a "Homeowner Packet" discussing ADUs. These packets are available at each of the listed cities.

Sewer: A common sewer line may serve an ADU and main residence when the ADU is either inside the main residence, attached to the main residence, or situated on the site such that a separate sewer line cannot be routed to the ADU. The existing sewer line must be properly sized to accommodate the additional plumbing fixtures. *Exception: Cities served by Sammamish Plateau Water and Sewer District should check with that purveyor for separate conditions.*

ADUs constructed in relation to an existing residence on a septic system will first need approval from the applicable county health department to determine the feasibility of adding an ADU. Additional bedrooms and/or plumbing fixture changes may require alterations to the existing septic system that may or may not be supported by the size of the property, septic tank, drain field, or other conditions.

A permit is required for any additions or alterations to an existing sewer line.

Water: The ADU may be served by the common water main and meter serving the main residence, as long as the water line and water pressure are properly sized to accommodate additional plumbing fixtures. An approved water shut-off valve must be in a location equally accessible at all times to occupants of both units. Those cities served by the Sammamish Plateau Water and Sewer District (Sammamish and Issaquah) require a separate water meter for detached ADUs.

A permit is required for any new water line installation and any additions or alterations to an existing water line.

Gas: If a natural gas line serving both units is provided as a fuel source, an approved gas shut-off valve must be in a location equally accessible at all times to occupants of both units. Adding gas appliances to an existing gas service may require changes to the gas service and lines. Where a separate gas line is provided for the ADU, the shut-off valve for the ADU must be accessible to the ADU occupants.

A plumbing or mechanical permit is required for any new gas line and/or gas appliance installation or for any additions or alterations to any existing gas line.

Electrical (2002 National Electrical Code): A single shared electrical service, a single meter, and a single main service panel are allowed to serve both the main residence and the ADU, provided that the main service panel is in a location equally accessible at all times to occupants of both units. The capacity of the service panel must be of sufficient size to safely handle the electrical loads of both units, as determined by the National Electrical Code. Other requirements might include arc fault protection, required for all bedrooms; one switched light or outlet for every 12 lineal feet of wall (4 feet in kitchens); and two small appliance outlets in the kitchen.

An electrical permit is required for any new electrical service or system or for any additions or alterations to any existing electrical service or system.

Heating System (2003 International Residential Code [IRC] R303.8): Heating must be capable of maintaining a 68°F temperature 3 feet above the floor and 2-feet from exterior walls in all habitable rooms. Habitable rooms are rooms used for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking. Portable space heaters cannot be used to achieve compliance with this requirement. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces, and similar areas are not considered habitable rooms (IRC R202).

Heating systems must be capable of providing independent temperature control for each dwelling unit (Washington State Energy Code 503.8.3.1).

Return air from one dwelling unit cannot be discharged into another dwelling unit (IRC G2442.7). This may prevent an ADU from sharing a furnace that also serves the main residence since the return air would normally come from the main residence. Alternative methods for achieving return air from a neutral source may be available, as approved by your local building official and as approved by the furnace manufacturer for the specific use. See last section of this guideline, "Modifications; Alternate Materials, Design, and Methods."

A permit is required for the installation or alteration of any new or existing heating system.

Plumbing Systems (IRC R306): Every dwelling unit must have a kitchen sink, toilet, lavatory or bathroom sink, and bathtub or shower. Each required sink, bathtub or shower, laundry tub, and washing machine outlet must be provided with hot and cold running water.

If any of the above are added to an existing home, it is possible that changes to all of the following may be required:

- Water service line (2003 Uniform Plumbing Code [UPC] 610.0)
- Water meter (UPC 610.0)
- Size of drainage/sewer piping (UPC 703.0)

A permit is required for any additions, alterations, or new installations involving plumbing fixtures.

Water Heater (UPC, Chapter 5): The ADU may be served by the common water heater serving the main residence as long as the water heater is properly sized according to Table 5-1. The water heater must be in a location equally accessible at all times to occupants of both units. Water heaters located in a bedroom or bathroom that depend on combustion of fuel for operation must be of an approved direct vent type or located in a designated closet with a weather-stripped self-closing door where all air for combustion and ventilation is obtained from the outdoors.

A plumbing permit is required to install or replace an existing water heater. Other requirements might include an expansion tank (if the water system is protected by a water backflow device), seismic strapping, protection from impact damage (if in a garage, for example), access for servicing, and combustion air. Construction Tip Sheet # 007, *Water Heaters*, references water heater requirements and is available at www.mybuildingpermit.com; select Public Information/Construction Tip Sheets.

Fire-Resistive Construction (IRC R317): One-hour fire-resistive construction is required between dwelling units (IRC R317.1).

Fire-resistive assemblies can be found in:

- ASTM E 119
- Underwriters Laboratory “Fire Resistive Directory”
- Gypsum Association www.gypsum.org; select “Fire Resistive Design Manual”
- Any nationally recognized independent testing agency listing

Openings between dwelling units must be protected and rated for installation in a one-hour wall. If the ADU is adjoining a detached garage instead of the primary home, separation requirements in IRC R309.1 and R309.2 will govern. No openings are permitted between a room used for sleeping purposes and a garage (IRC R309.1).

Construction Tip Sheet #012, *Fire Protection of Horizontal Venting*, references floor ceiling penetration requirements and is available at www.mybuildingpermit.com; select Public Information/Construction Tip Sheets.

Smoke Alarms (IRC R313.1 and R313.1.1): When an ADU is added to an existing residence, smoke detectors must be installed in the following locations:

- In each sleeping room (includes existing sleeping rooms, even if no work is done to the existing space)
- Outside each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms (includes existing hallways and areas leading to existing bedrooms, even if no work is done to the existing space)
- On each additional story of the dwelling, including basements (includes existing floors of the residence, even if no work is done to the existing space).

Construction Tip Sheet #004, *Smoke Detectors*, references smoke detector requirements and is available at www.mybuildingpermit.com; select Public Information/Construction Tip Sheets.

Emergency Escape and Rescue Openings (IRC R310): The following requirements apply only to new or altered windows and doors of an existing home used to create the ADU. Basements in dwelling units and every sleeping room must have a door or window approved for emergency escape or rescue that opens directly into a public street, public alley, yard, or exit court. That emergency opening must be:

- Minimum net clear openable area of not less than 5.7 square feet.
Exception: Grade floor openings must have a minimum net clear opening of 5 square feet.
- Minimum net clear openable height of not less than 24 inches.
- Minimum net clear openable width of not less than 20 inches.
- Minimum finished sill height (windows) not more than 44 inches above the finished floor.
- Operational constraints: Emergency escape and rescue windows must be operational from the inside of the room without the use of keys or tools (IRC R310.1.4).
- Window wells must comply with IRC R310.2.

A permit is required for any additions, alterations, or new installations involving window openings.

Light and Ventilation (IRC R303): Except for bathrooms, closets, halls, and storage areas, all newly created habitable rooms (spaces used for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking) must be provided with:

- Natural light by means of windows or doors having an area of not less than 8 percent of the floor area of the room.
- Ventilation provided by windows, doors, louvers, or other approved openings to the outdoor air having an area of not less than 4 percent of the floor area being ventilated.

- Some habitable rooms may be provided with artificial light meeting the requirements of IRC R303.1; see exception 1, and mechanical ventilation is also provided in accordance with exception 2.
- Bathrooms must have glazed areas in windows of not less than 3 square feet, one half of which must be openable per IRC R303.3.
- All interior and exterior stairways must be provided with a means to illuminate the stairs, including the landings and treads per IRC R303.6.

Minimum Room Areas (IRC R304 and R305): At least one room must have not less than 120 square feet of floor area. Other rooms except kitchens cannot have less than 70 square feet of floor area. Habitable rooms other than kitchens cannot be less than 7 feet in any horizontal dimension.

The ceiling heights in habitable rooms cannot be less than 7 feet, except that a ceiling height of 6'-8" over bathroom fixtures, such as showers, is permissible per IRC R305. For other room dimensions and clearances around bathroom fixtures see IRC R307.

Miscellaneous: An address must be posted on the house, clearly visible and legible from the street fronting the property. (IRC R321.1)

Modifications; Alternate materials, design, and methods of construction and equipment: The building code allows for certain deviations from the IRC under R104.10 "Modifications" and R104.11 "Alternate materials, design and methods of construction and equipment." Applicants should contact their local building official to submit for approval any alternates to these requirements that they believe are equivalent in suitability, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability, safety, and sanitation. Written justification and approved testing of alternate materials/methods is normally required for evaluation.