



**Accessory Dwelling Unit
Code Requirement Checklist**

June 2003

This building code checklist 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, 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, either inside, attached to, or detached from the primary home on the property.

Building 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. 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: The ADU and the main residence may be served by a common sewer line, provided 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 King County Department of Health 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 plumbing 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) must have a separate water meter for detached ADUs.

A plumbing 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, only the shut-off for the ADU is required to 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 (National Electric Code NEC): A single electrical service, a single meter, and a single main service panel would be 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 (NEC). Other requirements might include arc fault protection required for all bedrooms; 1 switched light or outlet for every 12 lineal feet of wall (4 feet in kitchens); and 2 small appliance outlets required 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 (Uniform Building Code UBC 310.11): Heating must be capable of maintaining a 70°F temperature, 3 feet above the floor in all habitable rooms. Habitable rooms are rooms used for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet compartments, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces, or similar areas are not considered habitable space (UBC 209).

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

Return air for a forced air furnace cannot be obtained from a dwelling unit other than the dwelling unit in which the air originates (Uniform Mechanical Code UMC 404.1). This may preclude 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 section below under Alternate Methods.

Plumbing Systems (Uniform Building Code UBC Chapter 29): Every dwelling unit must have a kitchen sink, toilet, lavatory or bathroom sink, and bathtub or shower. Each required sink, lavatory, and bathtub or shower must be equipped with hot and cold running water necessary for its normal operation.

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 (UPC 610.1)
- Water meter (UPC 610.1)
- Sewer line (UPC 703)

Water Heater (Uniform Plumbing Code 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 to accommodate additional plumbing fixtures. The water heater must be in a location equally accessible at all times to occupants of both units. Water heaters that depend on combustion of fuel for heat cannot be installed in any room used for sleeping, any bathroom, any clothes closets, or any closet or other confined space opening into a bath or bedroom. 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.

A public information handout referencing water heater requirements is available at www.mybuildingpermit.com. Click on the "public information" menu tab and then on "construction tip sheets."

Fire Resistive Construction (Uniform Building Code): One-hour fire resistive construction is required between dwelling units. Fire resistive assemblies can be found in:

- UBC table 7B (walls) and 7C (ceilings)
- Underwriters Laboratory “Fire Resistive Directory”
- Gypsum Association www.gypsum.org “Fire Resistive Design Manual”
- Any nationally recognized independent testing agency listing
- Specific alternatives listed in the Uniform Code for Building Conservation (UCBC) will also be accepted.

Since this is a modified tenant separation and not an actual occupancy separation, openings between dwelling units are not required to be protected. If the ADU is adjoining a detached garage instead of the primary home, separation requirements in UBC 302.4 will govern. No openings are permitted between a sleeping room and garage (UBC 312.4).

A public information handout referencing floor ceiling penetration requirements is available at www.mybuildingpermit.com. Click on the “public information” menu tab and then the “construction tip sheets.”

Smoke Detectors (UBC 310.9): When an ADU is added to an existing residence and the valuation of work is \$1,000 or greater, a smoke detector must be installed in the following locations, even if no work is done to the existing space:

- Each sleeping room (includes existing sleeping rooms)
- A point centrally located in hallways or areas providing access to sleeping rooms (includes existing hallways and areas leading to existing bedrooms)
- Each floor level (includes existing floors of the residence)

A public information handout referencing floor smoke detector requirements is available at www.mybuildingpermit.com. Click on the “public information” menu tab and then the “construction tip sheets.”

Exit Facilities and Emergency Escapes (UBC 310.4): 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. Make sure the emergency opening:

- Is operable from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge or effort.
- Has a minimum net clear openable area of not less than 5.7 square feet.
- Has a minimum net clear openable height of not less than 24 inches.
- Has a minimum net clear openable width of not less than 20 inches.
- Has a minimum finished sill height (windows) not more than 44 inches above the finished floor.

Light, Ventilation, and Sanitation (UBC 1203): Every habitable room (spaces used for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking) — not including bathrooms, closets, halls, and storage areas — must be provided with:

- Natural light by means of windows or doors having an area of not less than one-tenth of the floor area of the room, with a minimum of 10 square feet. Note: kitchens only may be provided with artificial light.
- Ventilation in accordance with the requirements of the Washington State Ventilation and Indoor Air Quality Code sections 302 and 303.

Room Dimensions (UBC 310.6): The ceiling heights in all rooms must be 7 feet or more.

At least one room must have not less than 120 square feet of floor area. Other rooms except kitchens must have not less than 70 square feet of floor area. Habitable rooms other than kitchens must not be less than 7 feet in any dimension.

Miscellaneous: An address must be posted on the house, clearly visible from the street (UBC 502).

Alternate Methods of Construction: The building code allows for certain deviations from the UBC under sections 102.4.7 “Modifications” and section 104.2.8 “ Alternate Materials, Alternate Design, and Methods of Construction”. 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 are normally required for evaluation.

Alternate methods noted in the Uniform Code For Building Conservation (UCBC) can also be submitted to the building official for approval.