



ADU Task Force Recommendations

JANUARY 2026

This document synthesizes the work of the ADU Task Force and explains the suite of recommendations that can increase visibility, demand, and ease of producing new ADUs in Grand Rapids.

PREPARED BY



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Background, Purpose, Members

February 2025 Grand Rapids City Commission stated a desire to expand ADU production. In turn, city staff recruited community leaders that represented key stakeholder groups, including small scale developers, lending institutions, social justice organizations, and affordable housing advocates. This group was tasked with identifying unnecessary frictions in the development process and creating a prioritized list of changes that could unlock additional ADU production and create new homes for existing and future GR residents.

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Executive Summary

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) have gained popularity in growing urban areas as a way to create additional homes in existing neighborhoods. As housing demand continues to outpace supply in Grand Rapids, there's been a growing interest in ways to spur this development to ease pressure.

The ADU Task Force was commissioned to identify points of friction in the current development process as well as existing best practices at play in other communities. The cohort identified this portfolio of opportunities for improvement that have been themed into four categories:



Customer Experience

How people discover, understand, decide, and plan to build an ADU



Zoning Reform

The rules and regulations that govern the placement, design, and use of an ADU



Building Code

The rules and regulations that guide the construction of an ADU



Finance

How people plan, budget, and access financial resources

Accessory Dwelling Units in Grand Rapids



Historically Popular

If you drive throughout the oldest neighborhoods in the City, you'll notice an abundance of these types of structures. Historically, they were called a Carriage Houses, Granny Flats, Guest Suites, or Mother-in-Law apartments. These units provided flexible living space for family members, potential rental income for homeowners, and multigenerational living arrangements.



Current Definition

Grand Rapids currently defines an ADU as, "A secondary and clearly subordinate dwelling unit that is contained within a detached single-family or two-family dwelling, included within an accessory structure, or separate from but located on the same lot as a detached single-family or two-family dwelling. Also known as a "granny flat.""

See: Article 16 of the City of Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance

Timeline of ADU Regulations in Grand Rapids

The timeline is represented by a horizontal teal arrow with four circular markers. The first marker is labeled 'Pre-1923' and 'No Zoning in Grand Rapids'. The second marker is labeled '1923-1969' and 'Early GR Zoning Ordinances'. The third marker is labeled '2007' and 'ADUs are Permitted under Zoning'. The fourth marker is labeled '2019 & 2024' and 'Modern ADU Zoning Reforms'. Below each marker is a detailed description of the zoning regulations for that period.

Pre-1923	1923-1969	2007	2019 & 2024
No Zoning in Grand Rapids It's the wild-wild Midwest. Anyone could build anything anywhere, so carriage homes or granny flats were a natural expression of multi-generational homes, live-in service workers, and guests to the owner.	Early GR Zoning Ordinances ADUs were not mentioned in the first GR Zoning Ordinance and were therefore prohibited. The 1941 Zoning Ordinance clarified that "rear dwellings" were prohibited. The strongest prohibition language was adopted in 1969 which states an accessory structure cannot be used as living or sleeping quarters.	ADUs are Permitted under Zoning The major Zoning overhaul in 2007 allowed ADUs in residential zones with approval from the Planning Commission. They were only allowed on lots at least 5,000 sq. ft., were limited in size, and the property had to be owner occupied.	Modern ADU Zoning Reforms In 2019, during "Housing NOW!" the minimum lot size was reduced and the review process was streamlined. The most recent amendments in 2024, made ADUs by right (no special approval), allowed them with one- and two- family homes, and removed the owner occupancy required.



Meeting Schedule

JULY

Understand the current process, understand the intent of the underlying codes and how those rules could be changed.

AUGUST

Explore the financial mechanisms and identify ways to improve resident ability + appetite for ADUs.

SEPTEMBER

Further develop and refine the list of recommendations for changes.

OCTOBER

Ruthless prioritization as the Task Force finalizes the recommendations.



Key Levers of Change

How might we increase a resident's awareness and ability?

Resident Ability + Appetite

Desire, Readiness, Education, Financing

How can we simplify the process or make it easier to navigate?

The ADU Process

Design

Permit

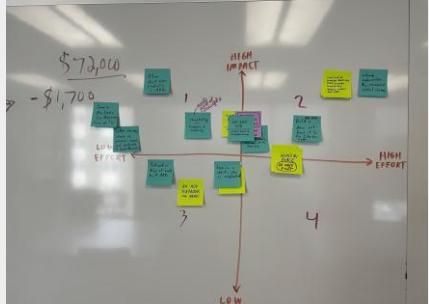
Build

Where can we eliminate/change unnecessarily burdensome code?

City / State Rules & Regulations

Zoning Code

Building Code



Discovering and Ranking Themes

105 Ideas were clustered into 20 themes, and then ranked by impact and ability to execute.



Overview**Tier 1****Tier 2****Tier 3****Tier 4****Customer Experience**

Develop a Marketing + Awareness Campaign

Publish ADU Guides + Toolkits

Create ADU Project Support Tools

Partner with Contractors

Develop a Grand Rapids ADU Hub

Establish an ADU Program

Publish Permit Ready ADU Plans

**Zoning Reform**

Adjust ADU Unit Size

Modify Accessory Structure Req's

Revise Site Layout + Placement Stds

Broaden ADU Use Requirements

Allow Short Term Rentals

Revise Greenspace Requirements

Allow ADU Lot Splits

Permit 2 ADUs per Property

**Building Code**

Change MFG Housing Approval

Modify Existing Building Code

**Finance**

Provide City Financial Support

Reduce Risk of Loans for ADUs

Establish a Public+Private Fund

Printed Packet for Further Review



ADU Task Force Recommendations

NOVEMBER 2025

This document synthesizes the work of the ADU Task Force and explains the suite of recommendations that can increase visibility, demand, and ease of producing new ADUs in Grand Rapids.

PREPARED BY

Names Here

Requirements

and in their community.



Tier 1 Priorities



Customer Experience

Develop a Marketing + Awareness Campaign

Publish ADU Guides + Toolkits



Zoning Reform

Adjust ADU Unit Size

Modify Accessory Structure Requirements



Building Code

Revise Site Layout and Placement Standards



Finance

Broaden ADU Use Requirements



Publish ADU Guides + Toolkits

As those who are interested in building ADUs may have no or limited experience in construction and development, digestible and clear resources and guides are essential for building the confidence to move forward.

Creating easy-to-understand visual guides and toolkits will help those interested in ADUs make informed decisions and build confidence in the process.

Task Force Ideas

- Educate about fair housing laws
- Create a fillable deed restriction that meets ordinance requirements and does not require property owners to seek legal expertise to create their own
- Use illustrations and infographics to communicate the building code requirements for an ADU
- Create a separate permit for ADU's — *Currently you request a normal new building permit*
- Collect list of contractors and design professionals who can help
- Work with financial partners to produce sample budgets and publish a list of lenders willing to finance ADUs

Implementation Considerations

Feasibility	Time	Resources
Easy	2-3 Months	\$\$\$\$\$



Zoning
Reform

Revise Site Layout and Placement Standards

All accessory structures, including ADUs have more flexibility in placement than a primary home/structure, but the accessory structure placement standards were written for garages and sheds and can be limiting for creative ADU site layout and placement.

Writing ADU specific site layout and placement standards can promote better urban design principles and help maximize the use of land for ADUs.

Task Force Ideas

- Reduce the front yard setback for ADUs on corner lots
- Allow zero lot line setbacks for ADU's when done behind zero lot line buildings
- Give City Staff more administrative flexibility in ADU placement
- Reduce or eliminate the rear setback for ADUs along alleys

Implementation Considerations

Feasibility	Time	Resources
Easy	4-6 Months	\$\$\$\$\$

Next Steps

- Evaluate prioritized recommendations

- Feasibility
- Budget
- Staff capacity

- Zoning Ordinance Update

- Short term updates
- Longer term updates

Overview



Customer Experience



Zoning Reform



Building Code



Finance

Tier 1

- Develop a Marketing + Awareness Campaign
- Publish ADU Guides + Toolkits

- Adjust ADU Unit Size
- Modify Accessory Structure Req's
- Broaden ADU Use Requirements
- Revise Site Layout + Placement Stds

Tier 2

- Create ADU Project Support Tools

- Allow Short Term Rentals

Tier 3

- Partner with Contractors
- Develop a Grand Rapids ADU Hub
- Establish an ADU Program
- Publish Permit Ready ADU Plans

- Revise Greenspace
- Permit 2 ADUs per Property
- Requirements
- Allow ADU Lot Splits

- Provide City Financial Support
- Reduce Risk of Loans for ADUs

Tier 4

- Change MFG Housing Approval
- Modify Existing Building Code

- Establish a Public+Private Fund



Thank you!



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