



Residential FAQs

Accessory Dwelling Units

Q1: What is an ADU?

A1: An “accessory dwelling unit,” or ADU, is a secondary housing unit on a single- or two-family residential lot. It can be attached to the house, or it can be a separate structure. An ADU is also called a “granny flat”, “in-law suite”, or “tiny house.”

Q2: What is the difference between an attached ADU and an attached two-family home?

A2: Michigan building codes do not differentiate between dwellings in an attached two-family home and dwellings in a single-family home with an attached ADU.

Under the City’s Zoning Ordinance, ADUs are permitted as accessory uses on all single- and two-family residential lots. Attached two-family homes are restricted in low density residential (“LDR”) zone districts. Additionally, ADUs must be smaller than the primary residential structure, while there is no relative size requirement for attached two-family homes.

Q3: Why does the Zoning Ordinance regulate ADUs?

A3: The Zoning Ordinance ensures that the ADU will be properly placed on the lot in relation to the house and the property lines, the structure will be visually compatible with the house and the neighborhood, and minimum greenspace requirements will be met. ADUs on property in a historic district may also need a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission.



Examples of ADU types, with ADUs highlighted in light grey/green.

Q4: How large can an ADU be?

A4: The Zoning Ordinance was updated in June 2026 to allow ADUs of up to 1,000 square feet, and ADUs may never be larger than the primary residential structure. An ADU must have a bathroom and a kitchen separate from the primary structure/unit.

Q5: Where can an ADU be located?

A5: ADUs are permitted on all single- and two-family lots. While they are permitted, ADUs still need to comply with the site and design standards in each zone district, such as setbacks from property lines and building height. See the interactive zoning map or zoning map PDFs to identify the zone district of your property. ADUs do not count towards the maximum area and

number of accessory structures on each lot. See Section 5.2.08. of the Zoning Ordinance for Accessory Structure (shed, garage) requirements.

Q6: How tall can an ADU be?

A6: Attached ADUs are subject to the height regulations of the zone district in which they are located. Please reference Sec. 5.5.07. for Residential Zone District Building Requirements. Detached ADUs may not be taller than 25 feet.

Q7: Can an ADU be rented out?

A7: Yes. If an ADU is leased, it must be registered and certified as a rental through our Code Compliance office. Be aware that ADUs cannot be rented for fewer than thirty days (i.e., as 'short-term rentals,' Airbnb, Vrbo). Details about the rental registration process can be found in Chapter 140 of the City Code of Ordinances, and on the City's Code Compliance webpage. A deed restriction stipulating that the ADU will not be conveyed separately from the main house shall be recorded. Contact the Planning Department at planning@grcity.us for a free deed restriction template!

Q8: What building codes apply to ADUs?

A8: Attached and detached ADUs are treated as an additional dwelling and are subject to the Michigan Residential Code. Keep in mind:

- A licensed residential contractor is required to apply for permits and complete the construction.
- Mechanical, electrical, or plumbing work must obtain a permit and be performed by a licensed contractor.
- Separate air handling systems are required for the main house and the ADU.
- The main house and the ADU need to be fire separated with one-hour rated walls and ceiling assemblies.

- The main house and the ADU must have separate utility meters and electrical panels.

Converting either a portion of an existing single-family home or an existing detached accessory structure (such as a garage) to an ADU may require wall and floor alterations to meet the fire separation and rating requirements. A new detached ADU is subject to all building codes applicable to any single family-home. Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing Codes also apply and may require additional permitting.

Q9: What are the water and sewer requirements for an ADU?

A9: For ADUs attached to or within a home, a plumber is responsible for ensuring the water service, water meter, and sewer lateral are adequately sized for the increase in water demand and sewer capacity. Additional connection permit fees will be due if a larger meter is required. An ADU detached from the main house is subject to the same requirements as a single-family home:

- A dedicated water connection is preferred.
- A dedicated sewer connection is required.
- Water/sewer connection and inspection permits are required.
- Only City of Grand Rapids staff may tap a live water main.

Private submetering is allowed but is the responsibility of the owner. Only one City meter and bill will be provided for each building.

Water or sewer questions can be directed to watersewerservices@grcity.us.