

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

# ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT DESIGN GUIDE

SEPTEMBER 2022



Use this guide with its companion documents  
Santa Cruz County ADU Basics and ADU Financing Guide  
and the resources provided at  
[sccoplanning.com/ADU](http://sccoplanning.com/ADU)

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This Guide is not a substitute for the Santa Cruz County Code. If there are discrepancies between this Guide and the County Code, the language in the County Code will govern.

Some properties may have environmental or utility constraints that increase costs, restrict siting options, or require extra review for ADUs. Please consult with County staff for projects with these special circumstances.

## Design Your ADU

This booklet offers guidance on the many configurations and design options that are available to homeowners, in an effort to assist homeowners in finding the best design for their property and for the future occupants of the ADU. Included are summary diagrams of development standards; sample floor plans; design considerations, tips and best practices; and example photos of the following ADU types:

- New Construction ADUs within the Urban Service Line
- New Construction ADUs outside of the Urban Service Line
- Conversion ADUs

A “Remodel Alternative” is also demonstrated. This option does not create a separate ADU; rather, it is a way for homeowners to improve and/or create more flexible use of the home which can include “rentable” space to roommates, from existing interior space. These spaces are defined in the code by their efficiency kitchen areas. See Santa Cruz County Code Section 13.10.700-D: Definition of “dwelling unit.”

All ADUs must be designed to meet three of the following six objective design standards:

- Roof pitch matching the dominant roof pitch of the primary dwelling(s);
- Roof material matching primary dwelling(s);
- Primary siding material and/or color matching primary dwelling(s);
- Window and door trim matching primary dwelling(s);
- Porch, bay window, or other facade articulation to break up flat wall plans;
- Fencing or landscaping to buffer the view of the ADU from a road or other public area.



To determine whether your property is within or outside of the Urban Service Line, go to: [www.sccoplanning.com/PlanningHome/zoningDevelopment/What'sMyZoning.aspx](http://www.sccoplanning.com/PlanningHome/zoningDevelopment/What'sMyZoning.aspx)

**EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES**

- Even on smaller urban lots an ADU can be added. An 800-square foot ADU must be allowed regardless of existing lot coverage or floor area of existing buildings on the parcel. Limiting factors will generally be:
  - » Required building separation (3' for ADUs)
  - » Required off-street parking
- An additional five feet of building height is allowed subject to design review, and may be appropriate on some properties.



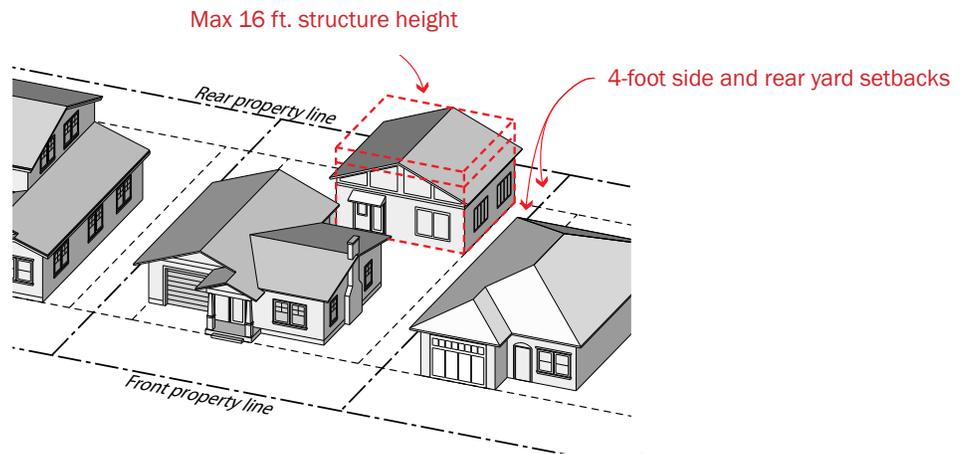
- Innovative interior design can accommodate full kitchens in small spaces. Smaller units are less expensive to build.



**Detached New Construction**

*Inside the Urban Service Line*

**DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**



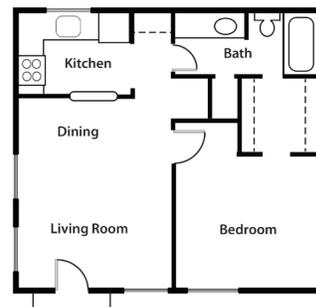
Maximum ADU size:

- For parcels <1 acre: 1-bedroom: 850 sq. ft. (1 bedroom), 1000 sq. ft. (multi-bedroom)
- For parcels >1 acre: 1,200 sq. ft.

**SAMPLE FLOOR PLANS**



Approx. 360 sq. ft. detached ADU. Includes studio bedroom/living area and full kitchen.

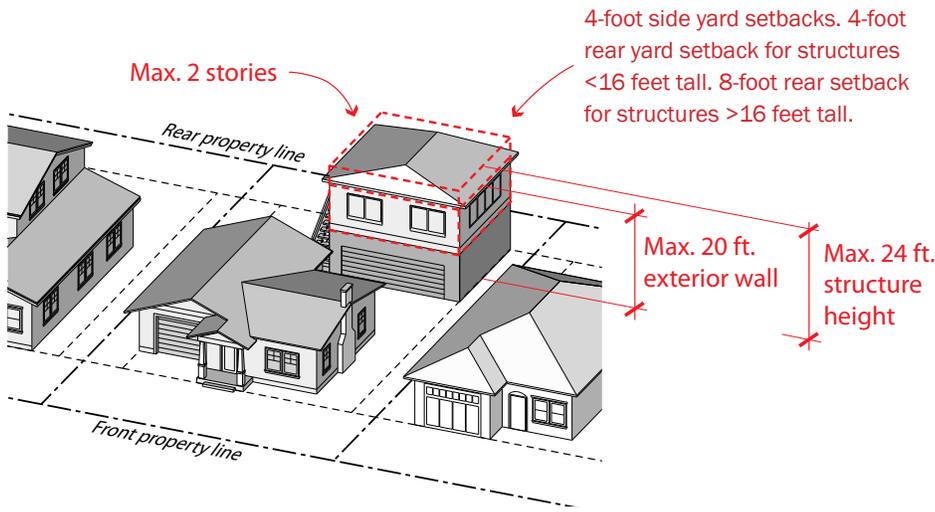


Approx. 640 sq. ft. detached ADU. Includes one bedroom and full kitchen.

## New Construction above a Detached Garage

Inside the Urban Service Line

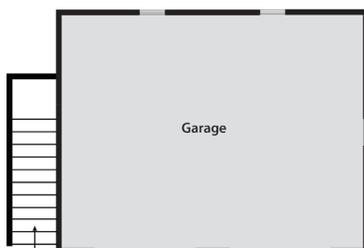
### DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



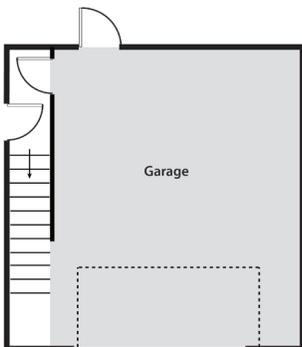
Maximum ADU size:

- For parcels <1 acre: 1-bedroom: 850 sq. ft. (1 bedroom), 1000 sq. ft. (multi-bedroom)
- For parcels >1 acre: 1,200 sq. ft.

### SAMPLE FLOOR PLANS



Approx. 460 sq. ft. ADU above existing detached garage. Includes one bedroom and full kitchen.



Approx. 640 sq. ft. ADU above existing detached garage. Includes two bedrooms and full kitchen.

### EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

- Required side setbacks for an ADU above an existing detached garage are 4 feet, and second story rear setbacks are 8 feet, regardless of the setbacks of the existing detached garage.
- An ADU above an existing garage should be designed with colors, materials, and forms that are consistent with the design of the garage.



[www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)



[www.historicshed.com](http://www.historicshed.com)

- Standards for exterior wall and maximum height limits encourage interesting roof forms.
- Second-story window placement should be sensitive to the privacy of both the ADU and adjacent neighbors.

### EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

- Attached new construction includes:
  - » A second story addition above existing one-story single-family dwelling;
  - » A second-story addition above existing attached garage;
  - » A one-story extension of the existing floorplan; and
  - » A two-story extension of the existing floorplan.



[www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)



[www.accessorydwellings.org](http://www.accessorydwellings.org)



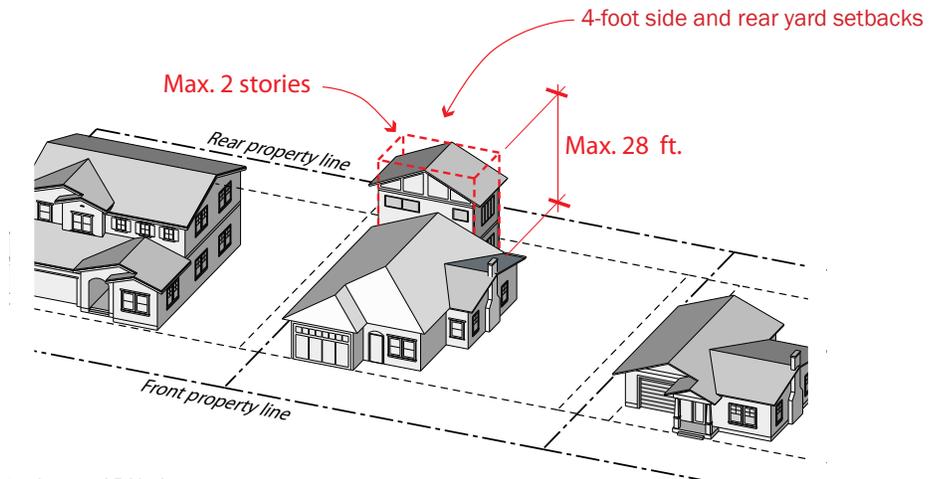
Dyett & Bhatia

- On small lots, attached new construction may be more feasible than detached new construction.
- Placement of plumbing to take advantage of existing drains and vents can simplify an addition.

## Attached New Construction

*Inside the Urban Service Line*

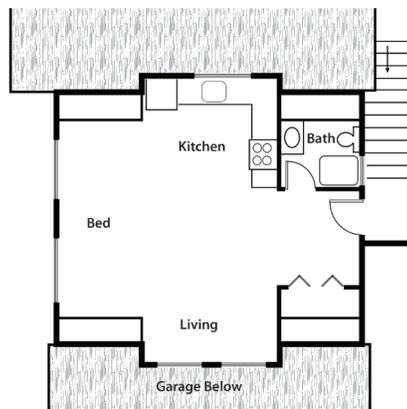
### DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



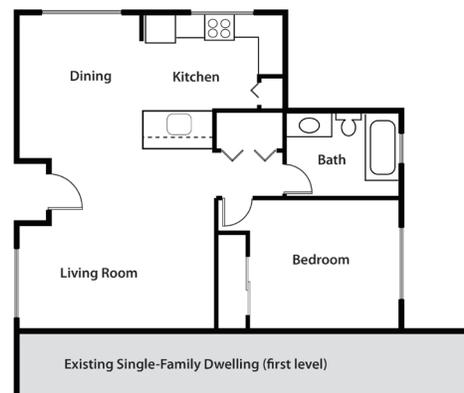
Maximum ADU size:

- For parcels <1 acre: 1-bedroom: 850 sq. ft. (1 bedroom), 1000 sq. ft. (multi-bedroom) OR 50 percent of the primary dwelling habitable square footage (whichever is smaller)
- For parcels >1 acre: 50 percent of the primary dwelling habitable square footage

### SAMPLE FLOOR PLANS



Approx. 550 sq. ft. ADU above existing attached garage. Includes studio bedroom/living area and full kitchen.

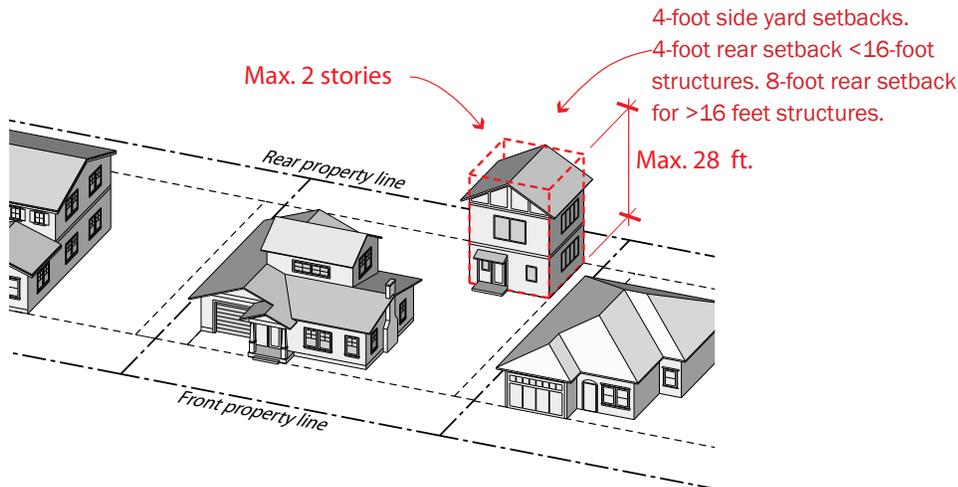


Approx. 800 sq. ft. ADU added on to rear of single-family dwelling. Includes one bedroom and full kitchen.

## Detached New Construction

*Outside of the Urban Service Line*

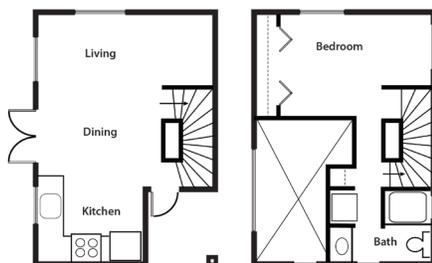
### DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



Maximum ADU size:

- For parcels <1 acre, 1-bedroom: 850 sq. ft. (1 bedroom), 1000 sq. ft. (multi-bedroom)
- For parcels >1 acre: 1,200 sq. ft.

### SAMPLE FLOOR PLANS



(Left) Approx. 540 sq. ft. detached new two-story ADU. Includes one bedroom and full kitchen.

(Below) Approx. 1,200 sq. ft. detached new two-story ADU (requires 1 acre or larger lot size). Includes two to three bedrooms and two full baths, and full kitchen.



### EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

- A 28-foot height limit outside of the Urban Service Line allows two-story ADUs. Compact stair design may maximize usable interior space.



[www.smallhousebliss.com](http://www.smallhousebliss.com)



[www.accessorydwellings.org](http://www.accessorydwellings.org)



[www.accessorydwellings.org](http://www.accessorydwellings.org)

- Location on the lot and placement of second-story windows should be sensitive to the privacy of both the ADU and adjacent neighbors.
- A safe path of travel must be provided between the ADU and the sidewalk/street.

**EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES**

- Outside of the Urban Services Line, ADUs can be built to the 28-foot height limit that applies to primary dwellings.
- An ADU above an existing garage should be designed with colors, materials, and forms that are consistent with the design of the garage below.
- Second-story window placement should be sensitive to the privacy of both the ADU and adjacent neighbors.



www.houzz.com

- Exterior stairs, windows, and decks can enhance the design of an ADU and maximize efficiency of indoor space.

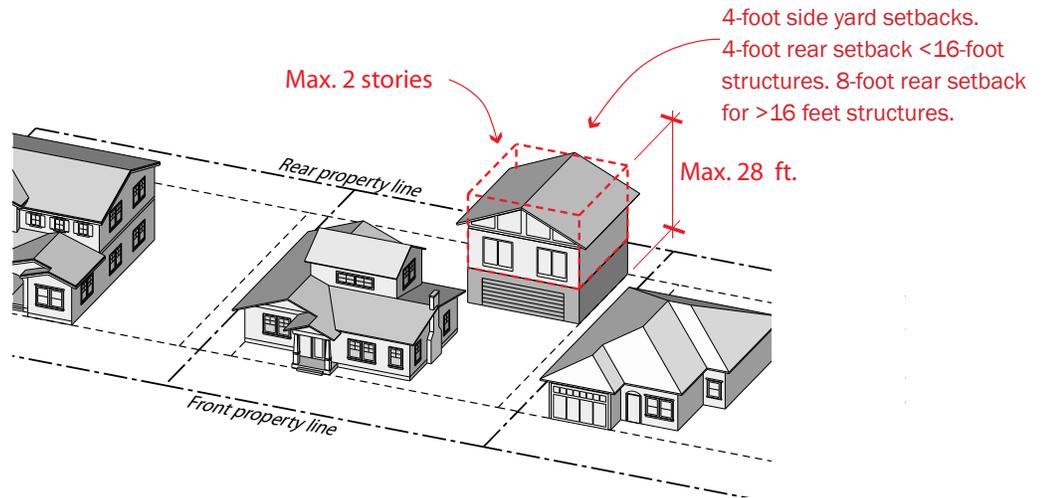


www.inhabitat.com

**New Construction above a Detached Garage**

*Outside of the Urban Service Line*

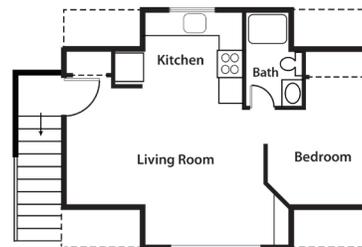
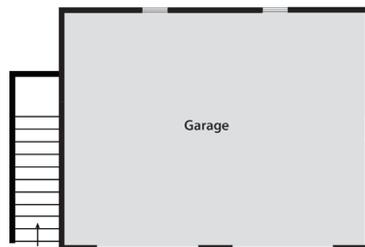
**DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**



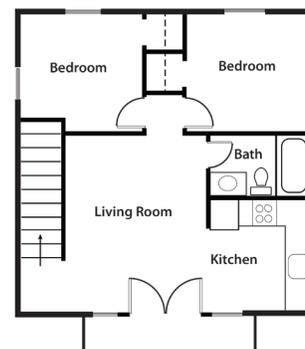
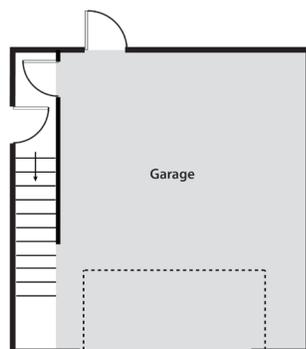
Maximum ADU size:

- For parcels <1 acre, 1-bedroom: 850 sq. ft. (1 bedroom), 1000 sq. ft. (multi-bedroom)
- For parcels >1 acre: 1,200 sq. ft.

**SAMPLE FLOOR PLANS**



Approx. 460 sq. ft. ADU above existing detached garage. Includes one bedroom and full kitchen.

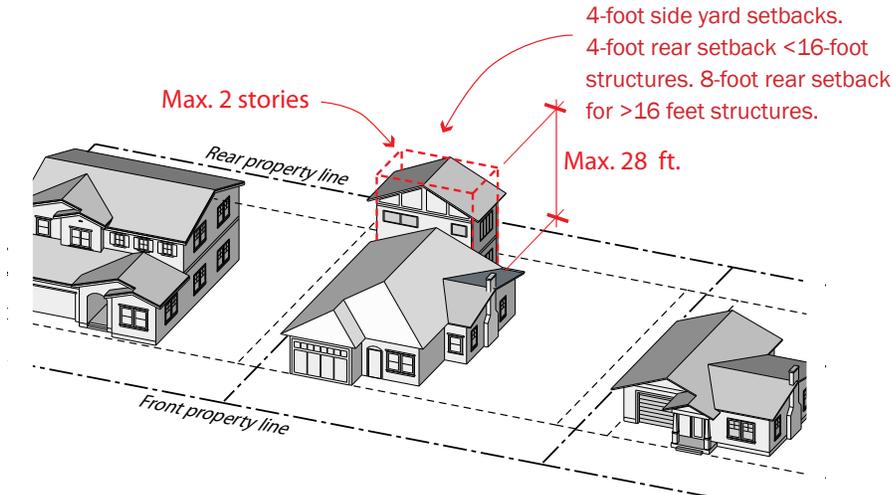


Approx. 640 sq. ft. ADU above existing detached garage. Includes two bedrooms and full kitchen.

## Attached New Construction

*Outside of the Urban Service Line*

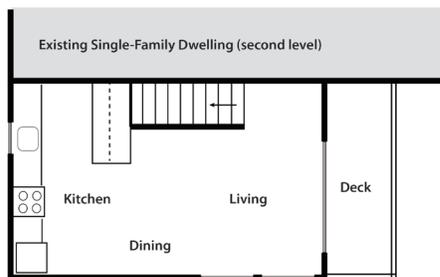
### DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



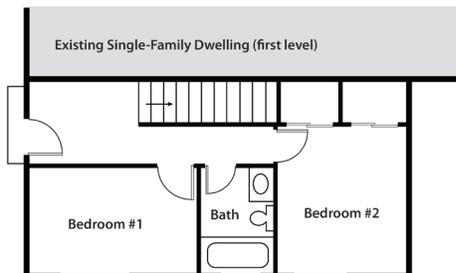
Maximum ADU size:

- For parcels <1 acre, 1-bedroom: 850 sq. ft. (1 bedroom), 1000 sq. ft. (multi-bedroom) OR 50 percent of the primary dwelling habitable square footage (whichever is smaller)
- For parcels >1 acre: 50 percent of the primary dwelling habitable square footage

### SAMPLE FLOOR PLAN



Approx. 1,000 sq. ft. two-story ADU added on to existing single-family dwelling. Includes two bedrooms, deck, and full kitchen.



### EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

- Attached new construction includes:
  - » A second story addition above existing one-story single-family dwelling or attached garage;
  - » A one- or two-story extension of the existing home.



[www.buildinganadu.com](http://www.buildinganadu.com)



*Dyett & Bhatia*



[www.urbanland.uli.org](http://www.urbanland.uli.org)

- Locating living areas and bedrooms against the exterior wall takes advantage of natural light and ventilation for the most commonly lived-in rooms. Bathrooms, kitchens, closets and hallways can be placed in more interior locations.

### EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

- Conversion ADUs involve the conversion of an existing living space, garage or accessory structure into an ADU.
- Conversion ADUs must have separate entrances to the exterior.
- Standard Conversion ADUs must have full kitchens. Junior ADUs may have efficiency kitchens.



www.homedt.com



www.pinterest.com

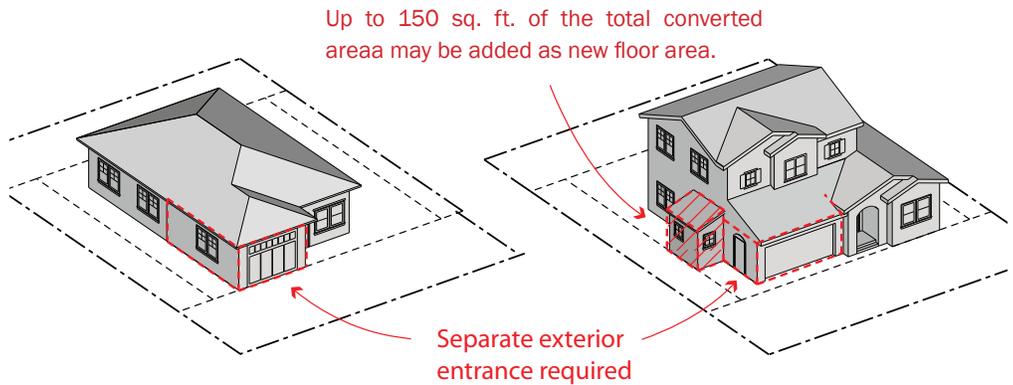


www.shelter-solutions.net

- Allowable new “pop-out” area in a Conversion ADU may be useful for new kitchen areas, new interior stairways that access second-floor space, or new covered entryways.
- Low ceiling height of an existing garage or basement may require floor excavation for the ADU to meet Building Code.

## Conversion ADUs and Junior ADUs

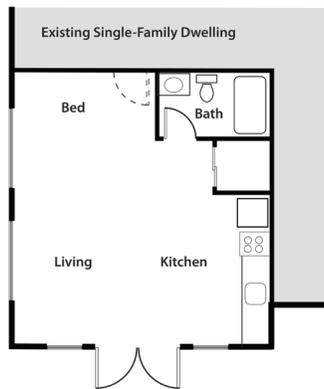
### DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS



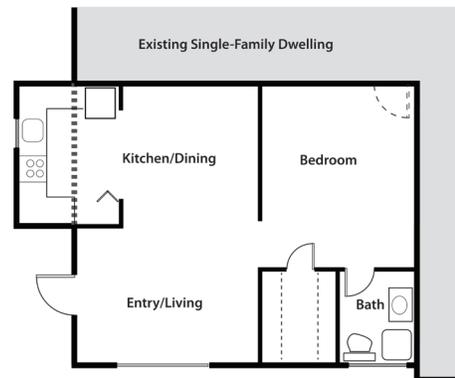
#### Maximum ADU Size:

There is no maximum size for standard Conversion ADUs. Junior ADUs have a maximum size of 500 square feet and must be converted from within the walls of the existing primary dwelling or attached garage. Additions altering the exterior walls of existing structures are limited to 150 sq. ft. of the total converted area. Interior remodels/additions to structures are allowed within size limits.

### SAMPLE FLOOR PLANS



Conversion of existing attached garage into an approx. 500 sq. ft. ADU. Includes studio bedroom/living area and full kitchen. This also could have been converted into a JADU with an efficiency kitchen.



Conversion of existing attached garage into an approx. 750 sq. ft. ADU. Includes one bedroom, living/dining area, a full kitchen, and an approx. 55 sq. ft. “pop-out”.

## Remodeled Home Creating Separate Living Space

This option refers to changes to existing interior space that create a partially independent living space rather than a fully separate unit. Remodeled areas may include basements, attics, lofts, master bedrooms, mudrooms, sunrooms, or other existing interior spaces. Efficiency kitchens (limited food preparation amenities) that use nothing more than a standard wall outlet (maximum 120 volts) are permitted in a remodeled space. Remodeled spaces with efficiency kitchens must be part of a single- or multifamily primary dwelling and are not permitted in any detached structure.

### DESIGN EXAMPLES



www.houzz.com



www.pinterest.com



www.decoist.com

Basement remodels may provide additional living and/or working space.



www.accessorydwellings.org



www.patch.com

Attics may be remodeled to create additional living space that is full-height or partial height, in cases where an additional building story is allowed.



www.homedit.com



www.apartmenttherapy.com



www.decoist.com

Other spaces for remodels include master bedroom suites, lofts, or sunrooms.



www.homedit.com



www.tinyhousedesign.com

Food preparation amenities in remodels are limited to efficiency kitchens, which allow a sink, refrigerator, small electric appliances that require maximum 120 volt electrical service (standard wall outlet), a food preparation counter, and storage cabinets. Full sized cooking appliances are not allowed in efficiency kitchens. Every primary dwelling in Santa Cruz County may have one standard kitchen plus one efficiency kitchen.



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Urban and Regional Planners