



DEDHAM, MA

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT (ADU) HANDBOOK



SECTIONS

1 OVERVIEW

2 ADU BASICS

3 RULES & REGS

4 PERMITTING

5 MOVE IN

6 FAQs

7 RESOURCES

HOW TO USE THE HANDBOOK

PACE YOURSELF

This handbook is comprehensive, and you might not need to absorb all the details right away. Rather than reading it once, refer back to each section of the handbook as you work your way through your Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) development process.

HYPERLINKS

Click on hyperlinks to take you to other relevant parts of the handbook or to external resources for more information.

BACKGROUND

In 2025, the Town of Dedham updated Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) zoning regulations to allow ADUs in all zoning districts that allow single-family dwellings. Since the updates, the Town of Dedham has received more interest in ADU's than ever before.

ADUs can expand the range of housing choices for residents in the Town, as well as provide other benefits such as helping residents age in place, adding space to house extended family, offering an avenue for rental income, and more. Developing an ADU can seem daunting. However, many ADU permit applications are submitted by homeowners who are first-time applicants.

CALLOUT BOXES

These colored boxes are added to help clarify some of the more confusing parts of the handbook. Blue boxes are used to define terms that are bolded, and red boxes are used to give helpful insights.

ONLINE & PRINT FORMAT

This handbook will live primarily online; however, it was also created in an easy-to-print format, so you can use the handbook in whichever way works best for you.

INSIGHTS

TERMS

Please note: This guidebook is intended to provide guidance, not a guarantee of approval.

The Massachusetts State Legislature passed the Affordable Homes Act in August 2024, which included a provision about ADUs As-of-Right. At the Town of Dedham's Spring 2025 Town Meeting, Dedham Town Meeting voted to adopt the Planning Board's updated regulations to comply with the Affordable Homes Act.

1 OVERVIEW

PROCESS AND TIMELINE

1 GET STARTED



Before you get started you need to do your homework. Are you allowed to have an ADU on your property? What are your goals? What is your budget? Then familiarize yourself with the ADU requirements in Dedham.

3 START YOUR DESIGN



Determine the basics of your ADU such as the placement, layout, and approximate size. Understand regulations such as zoning and building code requirements that may guide your design

5 GATHER ADDITIONAL INFO



Make any necessary changes to the design to comply with zoning bylaws and building code. Consider consulting the Public Works (DPW) Department and/or Dedham Westwood Water District (DWWD) for utility circumstances associated with the project.

7 CONSTRUCTION



Maintain open communication with your builder and schedule inspections with the Building Department throughout the construction.



2 FORM YOUR TEAM

2

Decide what level of help you need with your ADU development. Some choose to complete the ADU permitting and development on their own while others hire professionals to help with the application, design, and construction of their ADU.



4 MEET WITH THE TOWN

4

After you have a basic design for your ADU, contact the Building Department and discuss initial questions and address any critical issues.



6 BUILDING PERMIT

6

Submit online for a Building Permit application. Making sure all required information and documents are submitted will ensure a quicker review. When the Town completes its review and all project fees have been paid, you will be issued a Building Permit to begin construction.



8 MOVE IN!

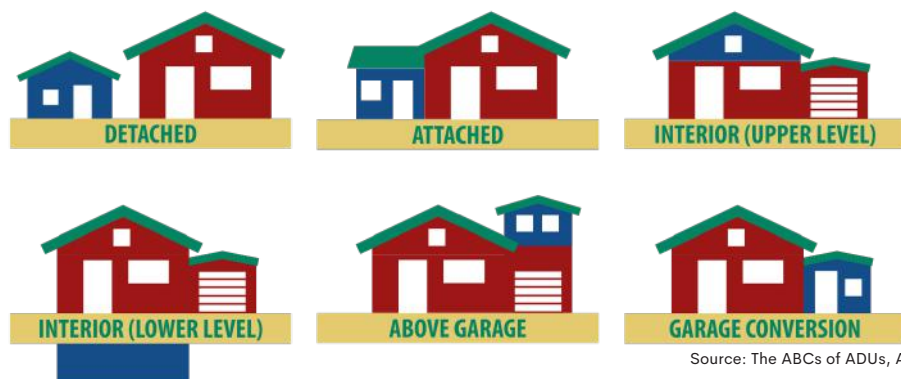
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Upon issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy by the Building Department, it's time to move in!

2 ADU BASICS

WHAT IS AN ADU?

An ADU is a small, self-contained residential unit located on the same lot as an existing single-family home. As the term "accessory" implies, ADUs are generally smaller in size and prominence than the main residence on the lot. These are sometimes called "in-law apartments" or "granny flats" because they are often used to house extended family. An ADU has all of the basic facilities needed for day-to-day living independent of the main home, such as a kitchen, sleeping area, and a bathroom. An ADU may be created as a separate unit within an existing home, as an addition to the home, or in a separate structure on the lot (such as a converted garage) or a newly constructed detached structure.



Source: The ABCs of ADUs, AARP

ATTACHED/ INTERIOR:

An ADU located within or attached to a single-family residence.

DETACHED:

An ADU that consists partly or entirely of a building that is accessory to a single-family dwelling unit.

IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS

- ▶ **Rental Income-** Renting an ADU can provide a steady flow of supplemental income while providing others with a place to live.
- ▶ **Downsizing-** Some people may wish to move into their ADU and rent out the main house.
- ▶ **Aging in Place-** An ADU can be a lifelong, accessing home for aging adults, or it can house an in-home caregiver.
- ▶ **Housing friends and relatives-** Close friends and family can stay together while also maintaining separate lives and privacy.
- ▶ **Community benefits-** ADUs help address housing challenges by adding smaller homes that help to provide workforce housing while preserving diversity and community characters.
- ▶ **Environmental benefits-** Small-scale living is an effective way to reduce the environmental footprint of a home and building within existing neighborhoods and can reduce commute times and make efficient use of public infrastructure and services.

CAN I BUILD AN ADU ON MY PROPERTY?

Where can an ADU be located?

ADUs are permitted in any zoning district that allows single-family dwellings. In Dedham, that is the majority of Town except for the large commercial areas along Providence Highway and industrial zoning districts.

ADUs in the Town can be categorized as either by-right (allowed) or by Special Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Below is a summary of a by-right ADU.

BY-RIGHT ADU REGULATIONS AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Allowed in zoning districts that allow single-family dwellings
- ▶ Only one (1) ADU is allowed on a property
- ▶ Maximum of 900 sq. ft. or less or 50% of principal dwelling (whichever is less)
- ▶ Property owner is not required to occupy the principal dwelling or ADU.
- ▶ 1 additional parking spot per ADU, unless within 1/2 mile of a major transit route

THERE ARE MANY ZONING DISTRICTS IN DEDHAM

Most Dedham residents reside in "residential" zoning districts, which are classified as "SRA", "SRB", or "GR". It is always recommended to go to the [Dedham GIS website](https://gis-dedham.hub.arcgis.com/) to check the zoning of your property to ensure that an ADU can be permitted on your property.



Screenshot of GIS site at <https://gis-dedham.hub.arcgis.com/>



Attached ADU design example. Source: Town of Dedham

3 RULES & REGS

ZONING

For further clarification on ADU zoning regulations, please review the Town of Dedham Zoning Bylaw Section 280-7.7 on ADUs.

STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

An ADU must comply with all zoning bylaw provisions including height, setbacks, and floor area ratio.

Applicants can request a **special permit** from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) to develop an ADU outside of the parameters required for an ADU by-right. The ZBA may grant a Special Permit only if certain criteria are met. Please refer to the Town of Dedham Zoning Bylaw Section 280-7.7 (D) for Special Permit criteria.

UNDERSTANDING THE RULES

Understanding all requirements and regulations for ADUs can help speed up the development process.

OWNERSHIP AND OCCUPANCY

The land on which an ADU is located shall not be subdivided from the land on which the primary dwelling unit is located. The ADU and principal residence must remain under common ownership and cannot be sold separately as condos. Only one (1) ADU is allowed per property. It is advised to consult the Building Department if adding an ADU to a property with multiple dwelling units (two-family, three-family, etc.).

A by-right ADU does not require the property owner to live on the property in either the principal dwelling or ADU. However, if an ADU is allowed by Special Permit, either the proposed ADU or principal dwelling must be occupied by the owner of the lot on which the ADU is located.

ADU SIZE REQUIREMENTS

- A by-right ADU may be no larger than $\frac{1}{2}$ the gross floor area of the principal dwelling or **900 square feet** whichever is smaller. If the ADU is allowed by Special Permit the max gross floor area is **1,000 square feet**.
- ADUs must meet the zoning dimensional requirements applicable to the ADU, whether attached, internal or detached.
- No more than one ADU per lot.



Attached ADU example. Source: <https://www.thisoldhouse.com/this-old-house/submit-your-house-to-appear-on-this-old-house-tv>

SETBACKS

Front, side, and rear yard setbacks for all ADUs must adhere to the Town of Dedham's Zoning Bylaws.

HEIGHT

Height for all ADUs must adhere to the Town of Dedham's Zoning Bylaws, typically 15 ft. for detached ADUs and 35 ft. for attached ADUs.

PARKING REQUIREMENTS

One off-street parking space is required for an ADU, in addition to that required for the primary dwelling unit.

- **Exception:** When an ADU allowed by-right is within 0.5 miles of a commuter rail, subway, bus station, or ferry terminal.

USE REQUIREMENTS

ADUs are not allowed to be used for short-term rentals (AirBnb, VRBO, etc.). An ADU can be used for a home occupation if it meets the zoning-bylaw requirements for home occupations

ADDITIONAL EXCEPTIONS

- If the principal dwelling is nonconforming for an ADU addition, a determination by the ZBA that the ADU will not be substantially more detrimental than the existing nonconforming structure is needed.
- The ZBA may waive ADU special permit requirements if compliance is impractical or unfeasible.

LEGALIZING A PRE-EXISTING UNIT

In some cases, there was already an non-permitted ADU at the time the current homeowner purchased their home. Units that are not legalized will be subject to enforcement. Pre-existing units must meet the same requirements as new ADUs, including parking and building code standards.



Detached ADU design example. Source: City of Bellingham, *Washington Homeowner's Handbook to Building an ADU: Making Room in Bellingham* (cob.org/wp-content/uploads/adu-homeowner-handbook.pdf)

ZONING REGULATIONS:

Town standards that determine what can be built on a property (including height and size). Zoning regulations can be [found on the Town website at this link.](#)

SETBACKS:

The minimum distance a building or ADU must be located from front, side or rear property lines. For example, a five-foot side setback means the ADU must be at least five feet from the property line.

UTILITIES

WATER/SEWER

Water and sewer utilities should be reviewed to determine whether they can serve the ADU and the main unit. Every ADU will require a sewer permit from the Town of Dedham due to the increase in number of bedrooms on a property. You may also need to upgrade your existing system or add a new connection for an ADU at your own expense. A flow test or pressure test may help you determine if your existing system can serve both units. Furthermore, if on a septic system, existing capacity should be reviewed. Water is managed by Dedham Westwood Water District and sewer infrastructure is managed by the Town of Dedham.

ELECTRICAL/GAS

Similar to water and sewer, electrical and gas systems should be reviewed to determine whether they can serve the ADU and the main unit. You may need to upgrade your existing system or add a new connection for an ADU at your own expense. In Dedham, the electrical/gas provider is Eversource.

OTHER

ADDRESSING

When construction of any new development is proposed, a request for address assignment is required. It is required to submit an address request prior to the issuance of any permits. The GIS Division will determine and assign valid address(es) in accordance with town regulations.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

If a proposed ADU is located in a Local Historic District, you will need approval from the Town's Historic District Commission. The Commission is responsible for historic preservation, contextual compliance, and regulatory design review within the designated Local Historic Districts.

WETLANDS/WATER BODIES

An ADU that is close to or in a wetland area or water body must be approved by the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission protects wetlands, related water resources, and adjoining land areas in Dedham. The Town's GIS-based Conservation Viewer is a great starting point to understand if wetlands or water bodies might be an issue.

STORMWATER

An addition or detach ADU will likely require a stormwater permit. Please visit the Town's Stormwater Management Division to understand what is required.

CONSIDER COSTS

Homeowners should evaluate the financial aspects of constructing an ADU. Here are some costs associated with building an ADU:

- Construction labor & materials (including demolition and site preparation)
- Architectural/design services
- Land survey
- Permit fees
- Utility improvements
- Increase property taxes (due to improvements)
- Financing (e.g. loan cost and interest payments)

4 PERMITTING

OVERVIEW

Constructing a new ADU will require the following permits:

- **Building Permit**
- **Electrical Permit**
- **Plumbing Permit**
- **Sewer Permit**
- **Address Request**
- **ZBA Special Permit (if not a by-right ADU)**
- **Stormwater Permit (if applicable)**
- **Conservation Commission (if applicable)**
- **Board of Health (if applicable)**
- **Water Service Permit (DWWD)**

BUILDING PERMIT

To file for a building permit for your ADU, a home-owner or licensed Massachusetts General Contractor is required. The permit fee is \$10 per \$1,000 in project cost. The following documents are required as part of a building permit application:

- Land survey/plot plan
- Architectural/design plans (Floor, roof, elevations, sections, foundation, and framing)
- Building Code summary
- Energy compliance
- Existing conditions photos
- ADU Addressing Acknowledgement

As part of the Building Department permit review, the project is shared with various other relevant Town staff such as electrical and plumbing inspectors, Health department, and the fire department.

ADUs must comply with local fire department regulations. Fire department review is a required part of the plan review process. Fire safety standards for site access, smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, building spacing, and hose-pull limits (max. 150 ft. from street) among other considerations ensure that the proposed design does not impede safety.

ONLINE PERMITTING

The Town of Dedham utilizes an online permitting system to file applications, upload documents, pay fees, and receive permits via:

dedhamma.portal.opengov.com



PLOT PLAN

A plan produced by a licensed land surveyor depicting the plot of land on which the house sits, along with zoning setbacks, coverages and any exterior features or structures including the proposed ADU and the existing residence.

DESIGN PLANS

A drawing to scale, showing a view from above with dimensions of the rooms, spaces, and other physical features at one level of a structure.

ELEVATIONS

Scaled drawings showing each side of a structure including vertical height and exterior features such as windows, doors, eaves, and porches.

5 MOVE IN

When you receive your certificate of occupancy from the Building Department, it's time to move in! Whether the ADU is for you, a friend or family member, or a renter—they are sure to love their new home. Here are some things to remember regarding the move-in process.

CONDO REQUIREMENTS

The ADU and principal residence must remain under common ownership and cannot be sold separately as condos. As part of the Building Permit, a restriction must be filed with the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds.

RESTRICTIONS ON SHORT-TERM RENTALS

Short-term rentals (for example, through services such as AirBnB, VRBO, etc.) are not permitted in ADUs or the Town of Dedham.

CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY

A Certificate of Occupancy (CO) is the final stamp of approval, issued after a building permit project passes all inspections, proving a structure is safe, legal, and up to current codes for people to live or work in utility services, and much more.



Detached ADU design example. Source: fourgenerationsoneroof.com/massachusetts-adu-regulations-2025-what-homeowners-need-to-know-for-multigenerational-living/

6 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

My Property has a septic system. Can I still build an ADU?

Consult with the Board of Health early in the process. Since a septic system is typically designed for a certain number of bedrooms, upgrading the system could be necessary for the addition of an ADU on the property.

Does the property owner need to live on a property with an ADU?

The property owner does not need to live on the property, whether in the principal dwelling or ADU, for a by-right ADU. However, the property owner is required to live on the property for an ADU that requires a Special Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Can I legalize my existing unpermitted ADU?

Property owners with unpermitted ADUs can seek building permits to legalize the ADU, provided all building requirements are met.

Does my attached ADU need a separate entrance?

Yes, the ADU needs to have independent interior/exterior entrances.

Does building an ADU impact property taxes?

It is possible. The construction of an ADU is considered an improvement to your property. The Town's Assessor reviews each parcel to determine its value. For questions about property tax assessments, please contact the Town of Dedham Assessors Department at 781-751-9130.

Can pre-manufactured, modular, or mobile homes be used as an ADU?

A pre-manufactured or modular home can be used as an ADU as long as it complies with required building regulations. A mobile home is allowed as an ADU if it is on a permanent foundation and complies with required building regulations.

Can I sell my ADU?

No. The ADU is included as part of the identified principal dwelling on the property and cannot be sold separately.

Can I rent my ADU?

Yes, but neither your home nor the ADU may be used as a short-term rental (example: AirBnB, VRBO).

Can I use my ADU for my home occupation?

Yes. However, home occupation use of an ADU is limited to Single Residence A (SRA), Single Residence B (SRB) or General Residence (GR) zoning districts. In addition, the home occupation must meet the zoning bylaw requirements for a home occupation.

How do I register a new address for my ADU?

Yes. Every dwelling unit needs to have a unique address for identification and safety purposes. A new address can be applied through the Town's online permitting system (open.gov).

Can I use my existing water/sewer utility connections for the new ADU unit?

Potentially. Utilities should be reviewed to determine whether they can serve the ADU and the main unit. You may need to upgrade your existing system or add a new connection for an ADU at your own expense. A flow test or pressure test may help you determine if your existing system can serve both units. For information on water, contact Dedham-Westwood Water District at 781-329-7090. For sewer, contact the Town of Dedham Engineering Department at 781-751-9353.

8 RESOURCES

TOWN OF DEDHAM



BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Building, Electrical, and Plumbing permits

☎ 781-751-9180

🌐 <https://www.dedham-ma.gov/town-departments/building>

PLANNING, ZONING, & NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

Zoning, Stormwater, Conservation Commission, and Zoning Board of Appeals permitting

☎ 781-751-9240

🌐 <https://www.dedham-ma.gov/PZNR>

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

Sewer/Address permits & GIS

☎ 781-751-9350

🌐 <https://www.dedham-ma.gov/engineering>

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Septic System permits

☎ 781-751-9220

🌐 <https://www.dedham-ma.gov/health>

OTHER RESOURCES

DEDHAM WESTWOOD WATER DISTRICT

Residential & Commercial water connection permits

☎ 781-329-7090

🌐 <https://www.dwwd.org/>



EVERSOURCE

Electricity & Gas

☎ 800-592-2000

🌐 <https://www.eversource.com/residential>

EVERSOURCE

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TOWN OF
DEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

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