

SMART GROWTH IN ACTION

Accessory Dwelling Unit Development Program

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA

Like many communities in northern California, Santa Cruz has seen its housing costs increase dramatically. These rising costs mean the city is struggling to retain teachers, police officers, and service workers. To address these challenges, Santa Cruz created an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Development Program. Accessory units create separate residences by converting all or part of a garage or by building new structures on a homeowner's property.

The city's program aims to create more housing opportunities by making it easier for homeowners to build accessory units. For example, the city revised its zoning ordinance to eliminate a covered parking requirement for single-family homes, which freed up space for accessory units. In addition, the revision included design elements that ensure the accessory units complement the surrounding homes. Seven architects designed compact building prototypes (500 square feet) that address a variety of site needs. These plans have been pre-reviewed by city departments, which helps homeowners by reducing processing time, planning fees, and design costs.

The city also released an ADU "How To" manual to help residents navigate the development process. The manual packages all the information homeowners need to develop an accessory unit, including guidance on making an accessory unit "neighbor-friendly," managing a construction project, and being a good landlord. Over 175 manuals and prototype plan sets have been sold. To encourage affordable housing, homeowners get financial assistance through accessory unit loan and fee waiver programs if the unit will be rented at an affordable level.

The program has broadened the range of available housing opportunities. In 2003, the program's first full year, 35 accessory units were built, which is a significant increase over the eight units built in 2001. Over the next five years, the city estimates that between 40 and 50 new accessory units will be built per year. The program has been so successful that more than 80 cities throughout California have requested copies of the ADU manual and ordinance. The EPA awarded it the Policies and Regulations Smart Growth Achievement Award (http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_awards_publication_2004.htm#policies_reg) in 2004, and the program has also been recognized by the state chapters of the American Planning Association (www.planning.org) and the American Institute of Architects (www.aia.org).

"...as my parents reached retirement age and found that they could no longer climb the stairs to the second story bedroom, they began looking for alternative ways of staying in the neighborhoodWith the help of the city's revised accessory dwelling unit ordinance, the design workshops, and the ADU loan program, we are now building the 'granny unit' of my parents' dreams."

— David A. Foster, Homeowner, Santa Cruz



SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

#1	Includes Mixed Land Uses	
#2	Exhibits Compact Building Design	★
#3	Provides Range of Housing Types	★
#4	Promotes Walkable Neighborhoods	✓
#5	Exhibits a Distinct Sense of Place	
#6	Preserves Open Space	✓
#7	Utilizes Existing Development	✓
#8	Provides Transportation Choices	✓
#9	Practices Fair Decision-making	★
#10	Promotes Stakeholder Participation	✓

QUICK FACTS

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Location: Santa Cruz, California
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