

ACCESSORY APARTMENT



An accessory apartment over the garage in a single family house

What are the objectives of Accessory Dwelling Units?

To add rental units to the housing stock of a community, while protecting the residential character of a neighborhood or community. Accessory apartments can improve the affordability of housing for both homeowners and renters at all stages in their lives.

Why do we need Accessory Dwelling Units?

Rising housing costs in Massachusetts have made finding and staying in affordable housing difficult. For some homeowners, with limited incomes and rising real estate taxes, the income from an accessory apartment could mean the difference

between being able to afford to stay in the community and having to move away. These apartments can also allow families to provide support to another family member such as a mother or grandmother who can live independently close to the family home. Current zoning for residential areas often precludes development of more affordable housing alternatives, like accessory apartments. Accessory units also help to maximize use of existing public infrastructure and services since they are created on already developed sites thereby reducing the pressure to develop on open space and farmlands.

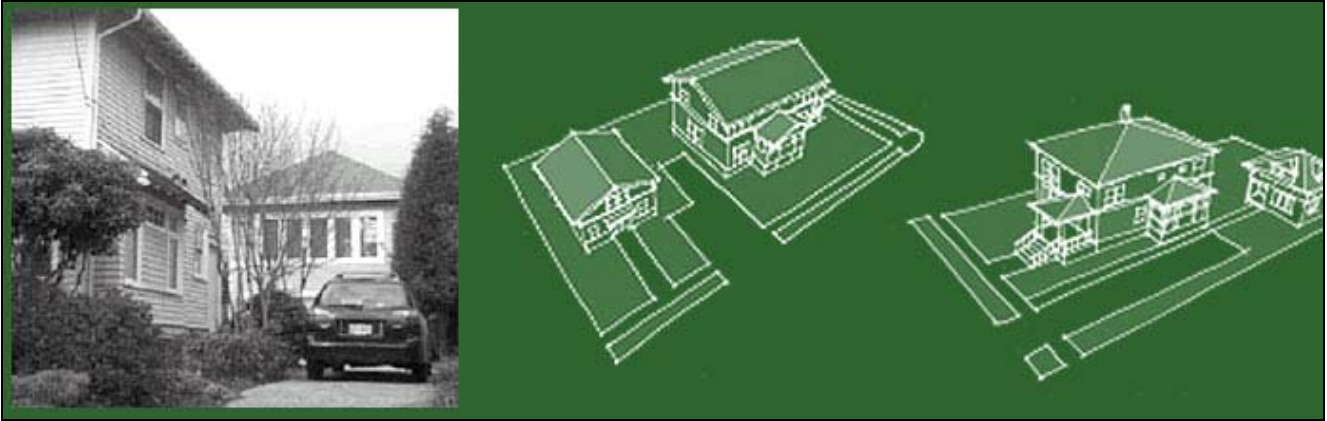
How do Accessory Dwelling Units work?

Accessory dwelling units (also known as accessory apartments, guest apartments, in-law apartments, family apartments or secondary units) provide supplementary housing that can be integrated into existing single family neighborhoods to provide a typically lower priced housing alternative with little or no negative impact on the character of the neighborhood. Because the units are usually small, they are more affordable than full-size rentals. Accessory dwelling units can be permitted and regulated through the adoption of zoning provisions.

DID YOU KNOW...

There are three different types of Accessory Dwelling Units...

1. Interior – using an interior part of a dwelling.
2. Interior with modifications – the outside of the dwelling is modified to accommodate a separate unit. Also called “attached” accessory apartments.
3. Detached – a structure on a residential lot that is a separate from the main dwelling, yet by definition still “accessory” and smaller than the main unit.



Examples of detached accessory dwelling units. Source: Massachusetts Smart Growth Toolkit.

EXAMPLES FROM THE PIONEER VALLEY

As of August 2007, there are 18 communities in the Pioneer Valley that have adopted Accessory Apartment Bylaws. Most of the communities in the region permit accessory apartments to be built within a single family home. These units are typically called “attached” accessory apartments, in that the new dwelling is incorporated within a single family dwelling, and therefore attached to the primary residence. Communities often encourage accessory apartments to be developed in this manner to ensure these new units blend within the existing neighborhood.

The *Town of Plainfield*, however, recently amended its Accessory Apartment bylaw to allow accessory apartments to also be built within detached accessory buildings, such as a barn or detached garage. In Plainfield, the development standards for accessory apartments are the same for both attached and detached apartments. The accessory apartments must be clearly subordinate to the primary structure, with the new unit being no larger than 1/3 of the existing primary, residential structure. By allowing residents the opportunity to build accessory apartments in these existing detached structures, the town has increased the possibility of the creation of affordable rental units to the existing housing stock, without drastically changing the character of the community.

Communities that have adopted an Accessory Apartment Bylaw

Amherst
 Chester
 Chesterfield
 Easthampton
 Granville
 Huntington
 Ludlow
 Monson
 Montgomery
 Northampton
 Palmer
 Pelham
 Plainfield
 Ware
 Westfield
 Wilbraham
 Williamsburg
 Worthington

[MODEL ACCESSORY APARTMENT BYLAW](#)

For more information on examples of Accessory Units from across Massachusetts, please refer to the state’s [Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit](#) developed by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.