

## Guest Column: Accessory Dwelling Units: Many Questions, Few Answers

October 7, 2021



Crescent City needs more low and medium cost housing.

Just last year, modest single-family homes were on the market for \$150,000 to \$175,000. Comparable homes today often command prices of \$225,000 and more. And these properties are quickly snatched up, often by out-of-town buyers.

Priced out of the home buying market, many local families are forced to compete for the limited supply of available and suitable rental housing. There are 1,794 housing units within the city, 1,136 units are occupied by renters. Just one-third of Crescent City families reside in their own homes.

Blame the red-hot housing market, and the high cost of land, labor and building materials. Consider also the upfront costs and delays associated with obtaining building permits and utility connections. Home builders can hardly keep up with the demand for more expensive, higher profit construction projects.

What can be done about it?

No longer willing to let the marketplace and reluctant local governments solve the housing crisis at their own pace, the state of California has enacted new laws that supersede local building ordinances. These laws now allow individual property owners to build “granny flat-style” accessory dwelling units in their own backyards, units that can be occupied by anyone, not just Granny, to produce rental income.

Cities are now required to streamline and lower the cost of the building permit process, and to provide financial incentives in the form of water and sewer connection fee waivers or other concessions that may lower overall costs by \$10,000 or more.

The new ADU law will make illegal garage conversions legal and allow single-family homes to be divided into two. ADUs can range in size from 150 square feet to 1,200 square feet or more, depending upon lot size, setback limitations and the size of the existing primary residence. Two ADUs can be added to a single lot, resulting in three dwellings on a lot that had been designed for just one.

The motive to generate rental income may inspire many individual property owners to take the ADU bait. But there is a hook. What may be good for opportunistic property owners may not be good for the rest of the neighborhood:

What impact will the increased housing density have on our neighborhoods?

As backyards and garages disappear, where will children play, and cars be parked?

What provisions will be made for increased traffic, noise, and other social impacts?

Will Crescent City be pushed further into a “city of renters?”

Will absentee corporate landlords replace individual owner-occupants?

Are San Francisco style housing goals a good fit for Crescent City?

What about the rights of those residents who like their neighborhood the way it is?

Changes are being forced upon Crescent City and throughout California. The planning commission has been conducting a series of workshops to address the state ADU mandates. The commission’s findings will be presented in the form of a proposed ordinance for adoption by the city council.

The final workshop session will be held October 14 at 5:30 p.m. Public participation is encouraged. This may be your best opportunity to influence the kind of community Crescent City becomes. Contact the Planning and Community Development at 707-464-9506 for more information.