

Crescent City Planning Commission conducts 'granny flat' workshop

October 10, 2021



Granny flats are coming to Crescent City, to your neighborhood, and maybe even to your own backyard.

The Crescent City Planning Commission conducted its second of three workshop sessions last Thursday to consider the details of a proposed ordinance to regulate Accessory Dwelling Units, previously known as granny flats. The ordinance will greatly simplify the permitting process for construction of ADUs on existing single-family residential lots. Space permitting, the ordinance will allow multiple ADUs - in addition to the existing principal residence - on a single lot.

An ADU can take the form of an existing or newly built detached structure, an attached structure such as a room addition or converted garage, or as a separate dwelling unit created entirely within the existing footprint of the principal residence. The ADU can consist of entirely new construction, or the upgrade and conversion of an existing structure to meet building code requirements.

The ADU can be placed on the residential lot so long as it meets the minimum property line setback requirements and does not exceed the maximum lot coverage area for the size and dimensions of the parcel. Incentives will be offered to decrease the time, complexity and cost of obtaining a building permit.

Why the Need for Accessory Dwelling Units?

Consideration of an ADU ordinance is in response to recent state legislation that requires all cities and counties within the state to increase the availability of very low, low and moderate priced housing. A regional housing needs assessment has determined that Crescent City has an immediate need for 189 additional housing units to be completed by 2022. Currently, nearly two-thirds of Crescent City residences are occupied by renters.

Construction of low and moderate priced housing has come to a virtual standstill as developers have been struggling to keep up with demand for more profitable higher priced housing. The ADU law is intended to allow individual property owners the opportunity to create additional residential units without land acquisition costs. The property owners can rent their ADU to tenants, or perhaps downsize into the new ADUs themselves and make the existing primary residences available to renters.

The ADU law gives cities considerable latitude with respect to the ADUs built within the community. Among the considerations are size, lot coverage, parking and whether or not to require owner occupation of the ADU property. Waiver of utility connection fees are also under consideration.

ADU Size Consideration

Minimum ADU sizes can range from 150 square feet for a “junior ADU” that might result from a garage conversion or room addition, to 800 square feet for a studio apartment, 850 square feet for a one-bedroom apartment, or 1,000 square feet for a two-bedroom apartment. Larger ADU sizes - 1,200 square feet or more - are also anticipated. One option permits an ADU to be as large as 50 percent as the primary residence.

Lot Area Coverage

The choices presented to the planning commission for lot coverage included the following: retaining the existing 50 percent to 65 percent building coverage limit of a lot, depending upon zoning; increasing the lot coverage area 10 percent to accommodate the ADU; or not count the additional building size toward the preexisting lot area coverage limitations. Lot coverage is further influenced by a minimum lot size of 6,000 square feet. The ADU law specifies that minimum side-yard setbacks shall be reduced from 5 feet to 4 feet. Rear yard setbacks might also be reduced to 4 feet.

Parking Requirements

Several parking scenarios were discussed by the planning commission. Generally, a single-family home must have two off-street parking spaces. State law does not allow the city to require additional parking for an ADU. Instead, the focus is upon replacing existing parking that is lost due to the construction of an ADU, such as when a garage or parking area is converted to an ADU. One option requires that each parking space

that is lost must be replaced elsewhere on the property. Another option reduces that requirement to one replacement for every two parking spaces lost. The third option does not require replacement of any lost parking.

Waiver of Permit Application and Utility Connection Fees.

State ADU law permits the city to waive the cost of ADU permit applications and connection fees to public utilities, such as water and utilities. These waivers, if granted, will save many thousands of dollars to homeowners who wish to build one or more ADUs on their property.

The planning commission reached an informal consensus on many of the considerations described above. Although no formal votes were taken by the commission during the workshop meeting, Director of Community Development Jon Olson was given guidance on what preferences to include on a proposed ordinance that will be brought back to the planning commission for further consideration at its next meeting on October 14, at 5:30 p.m.