



Massachusetts Municipal Association

## MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

*Recommendations for Effective Local Government Administration and Management from MMA Policy Committees*

January 2019 • Volume 4 • Number 5

### **MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Update Accessory Dwelling Unit Bylaws**

**BEST PRACTICE:** Each municipality should look at updating its accessory dwelling unit bylaw, considering whether to include successful techniques and approaches used in communities large and small across the Commonwealth.

Accessory dwelling units are a second dwelling unit on a single-family residential lot. ADUs are self-contained and can either be attached to the single-family dwelling or detached. ADUs provide supplementary housing that can be integrated into existing single-family neighborhoods to provide a typically lower-priced housing alternative.

The approach used by most municipalities for ADUs is a zoning bylaw that permits the improvements to be made. Common restrictions include maximum allowed building and site modifications, the options for choosing inhabitants, whether the owner must occupy the main unit, and minimum lots sizes. Generally, the greater the number of restrictions, the lower the number of homes capable of adding units.

The following are some ADU recommendations based on successful local practices:

- Do not restrict occupancy to relatives of the homeowner.
- Reconsider lot size restrictions in allowance for an ADU.
- Allow simultaneous construction and conversion of a primary dwelling to an ADU.
- Allow for attached or internal ADUs.
- Allow flexibility in parking requirements.
- Establish clear and objective standards around design.
- Consider a square footage cap that is not necessarily dependent on a percentage of the primary dwelling, as this can limit ADUs for older homes that are commonly smaller. The average for Massachusetts is 800-900 square feet.

(continued, next page)

- Develop a comprehensive short-term rental policy for your community.

**Resources:**

- Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit Modules – Accessory Dwelling Units:

[www.mass.gov/service-details/smart-growth-smart-energy-toolkit-modules-accessory-dwelling-units-adu](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/smart-growth-smart-energy-toolkit-modules-accessory-dwelling-units-adu)

- Metropolitan Area Planning Council webinar, Accessory Dwelling Units: Building Public Education and Support, July 2018:

[www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AARP-MAGIC-Webinar-on-ADUs.pdf](http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AARP-MAGIC-Webinar-on-ADUs.pdf)