



Building Guide

Colorado Chapter of the International Code

Accessory Dwelling Unit Residential ADU

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is an attached or detached secondary housing unit located on an existing single-family residential property or parcel, which provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, cooking, eating, and sanitation.

The International Residential Code defines habitable space as a space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces. Refer to Appendix AQ of the 2021 IRC for ADU construction.

How to Use this Guide

Check with your jurisdiction regarding type of submittal (paper or electronic) and additional requirements. Draw to scale and complete the following (hint: use graph paper with $\frac{1}{4}$ " squares. Example: $\frac{1}{4}$ " = 1').

- 1. Complete this building guide.**
- 2. Provide Plot Plan**
- 3. Provide Floor Plans**
- 4. Fill out a Building Permit Application.**



The Colorado Chapter of the International Code Council is a professional organization seeking to promote the health, safety, and welfare to building construction. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions. To obtain a master copy of this building guide, please write to the Colorado Chapter of the International Code Council, P.O. Box 961, Arvada, CO 80001. www.coloradochaptericc.org

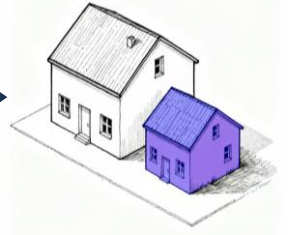
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Accessory Dwelling Unit

Understanding ADU Types

ADUs can be categorized based on their relationship to the primary dwelling and property:

1. Detached ADU: These are independent structures, such as backyard cottages, garage conversions, or accessory structures built separately from the main house.



2. Attached - Internal (within existing footprint) ADU: These units are integrated into the primary residence, commonly through additions, extensions, or conversions of existing spaces within the main home.

3. Attached - external (extending beyond existing foundation/structure) ADU: Created within the existing footprint of a single-family home, often involving the conversion of basements, attics, or unused rooms into a self-contained living unit.



Attached ADU Design Standards

Interior connections and lockable separation: All attached ADUs must be physically separated from the principal unit by either a wall or a lockable door. In an existing building, if there is an interior connection between the ADU and the principal unit, the connection must be maintained.

Rear Yard Setback: The minimum rear yard setback for attached ADUs is 5 feet, subject to standards related to height and building coverage per local code.

Height: Building height for attached ADUs must comply with the maximum height for principal buildings. For all zoning districts that allow ADUs, the maximum height is 35 feet. Per IRC R301.3 For wood wall framing, the story height shall not exceed 11 feet 7 inches and the laterally unsupported bearing wall stud height permitted by Table R602.3(5).

Detached ADU Design Standards

Height: While the maximum height of accessory structures is 20 feet, detached ADUs with a roof pitch of 8:12 or steeper may be up to 25 feet. Detached ADUs being converted from an existing structure may exceed 20 feet, as long as no changes are proposed to the building's height, floor area, or roof form for the conversion.

Building separation: Detached ADUs must have at least 6 feet of separation from any other building, measured between the two nearest points. See IRC Table R302.1(1) Exterior Walls for additional details.

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General Requirements and Zoning Considerations

While specific regulations are local, common requirements for ADUs typically include:

Size Limitations: Maximum allowable square footage, often a percentage of the primary dwelling or a fixed limit.

Lot Coverage: Restrictions on the total area of the lot that can be covered by structures.

Parking: Requirements for providing off-street parking, which may be waived under certain conditions (e.g., proximity to transit).

Owner Occupancy: Many jurisdictions mandate that the property owner resides on the premises.

Utility Connections: The need for separate utility metering for water, sewer, gas, and electricity is often a requirement.

Design Compatibility: ADUs may be required to feature architectural elements, materials, and rooflines that are consistent with the primary dwelling and surrounding neighborhood.

Building Code Essentials (Focus on IRC Appendix AQ)

Egress: Every habitable space must have at least one direct exit to the exterior. Emergency escape and rescue openings (windows) must meet minimum size and height requirements.

Ventilation: Adequate natural or mechanical ventilation must be provided to maintain healthy indoor air quality.

Lighting: All rooms require sufficient natural or artificial illumination.

Sanitation: Properly installed plumbing fixtures for bathrooms and kitchens are necessary, connected to approved water supply and drainage systems.

Structural Integrity: The ADU must be designed and constructed to safely withstand all applicable structural loads, including snow, wind, seismic activity, and occupancy live loads.

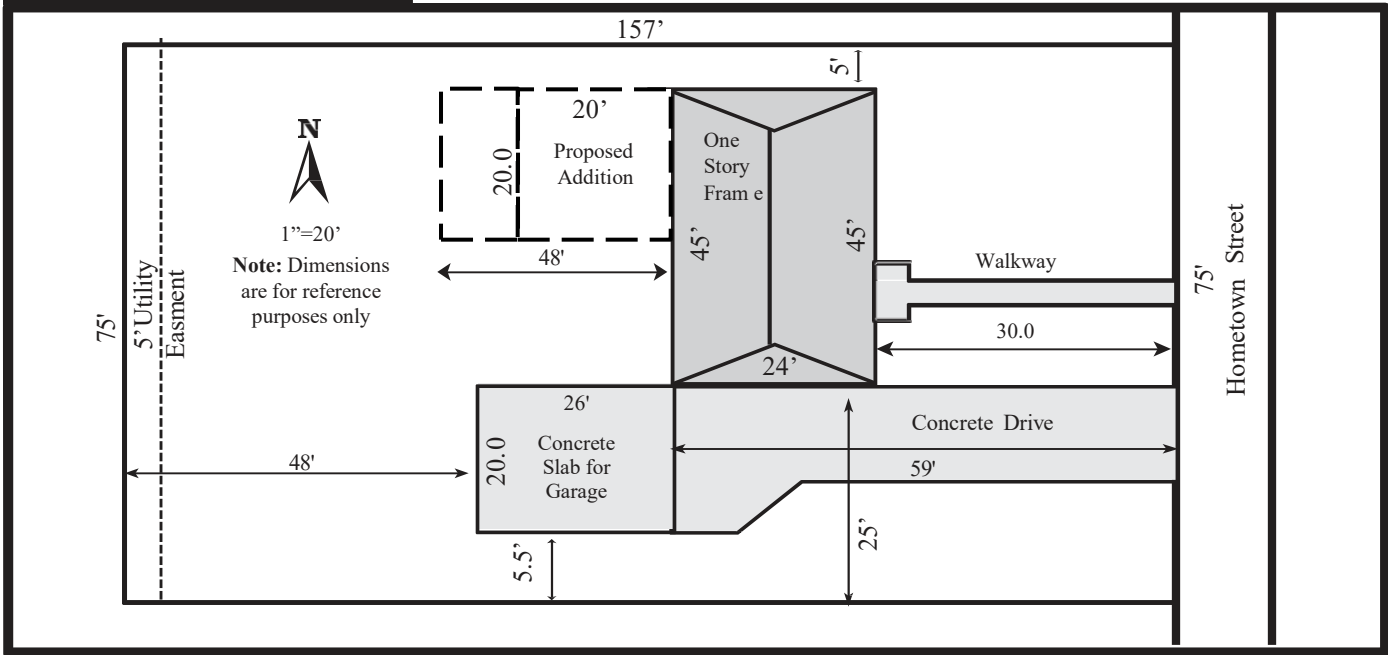
Fire Safety: Specific requirements for fire-resistance-rated construction may be necessary, especially for attached units or those located near property lines, to ensure separation from the primary dwelling.

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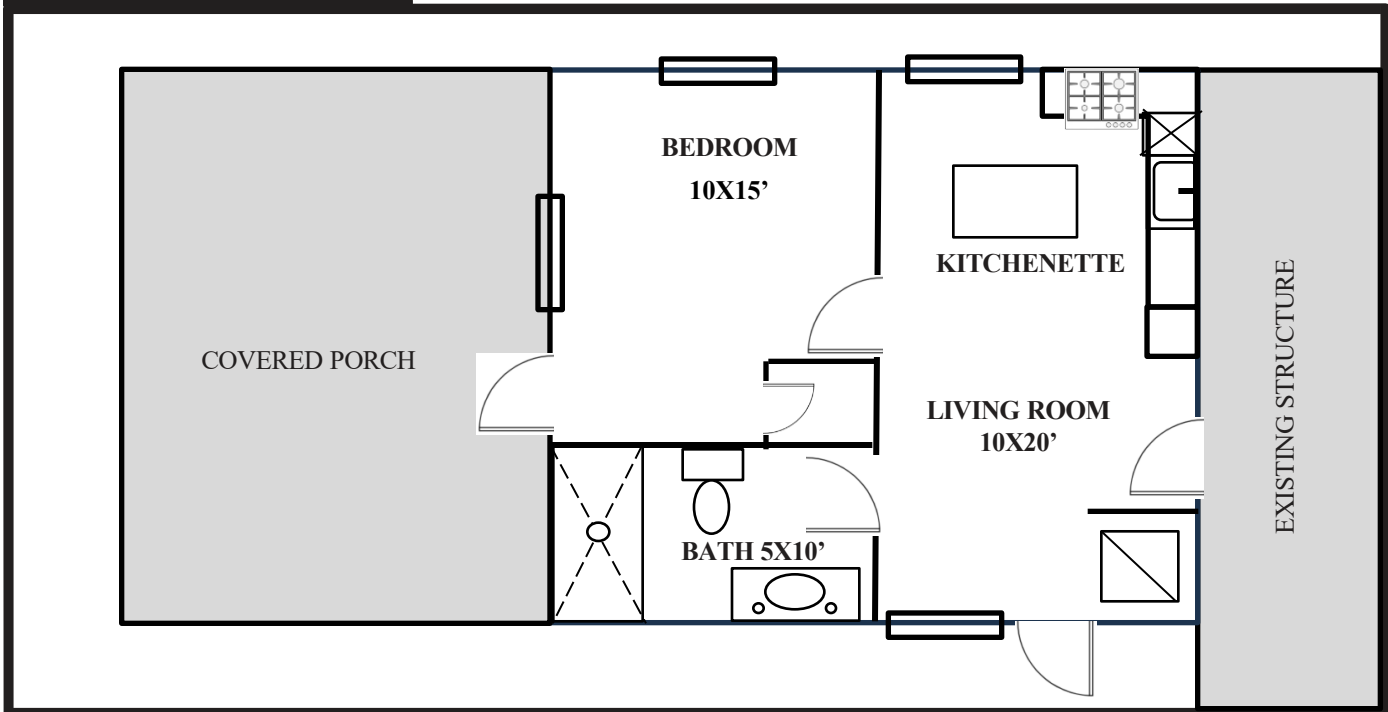
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Note: A plot plan (plan view) showing the dimensions of your project or additions and its relationships to existing buildings or structures on the property must be included. In addition to project dimensions, your plot plan must also show other details such as post locations and spacing, joist and beam spans, and any other pertinent information not shown on the section drawing.

Site Plan Example



Plan View Example



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