

# Obtaining a permit for your existing **ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT** (commonly known as an in-law or granny unit)



## What's an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)?

Attached or detached residential dwelling, located on the same parcel as an existing single-family dwelling. An ADU provides complete independent living facilities, including sleeping, cooking, bathing and sanitation.

## My ADU was built without permits or inspections – what can I do?

Owners of existing ADUs built without permits and inspections may still be able to apply for a building permit to legalize the use.

The City of Santa Rosa allows owners to make an initial inquiry to find out if an ADU is an allowable use on their property without risk of repercussion.

There is no fine or penalty for legalizing an existing ADU. Applicants would be subject to the same fees as a new ADU project in effect at time of submittal.

## What do I need to know about the permit process?

Buildings must meet the minimum current building code requirements to receive a building permit. This may pose unique challenges for existing ADUs as such spaces may not have been originally designed to be habitable. These ADUs may need upgrades such as emergency exits, windows and weatherproofing to meet building code standards for a dwelling. Since the plan review and inspections will occur after the work is finished and are often covered or concealed, the owner of an existing structure will be responsible for making various components of the building accessible for inspection. This may require the removal of building finish coverings. Special testing or reports performed by a testing agency approved by the building department may also be required for foundations, electrical and/or mechanical systems.

## WHY SHOULD I PERMIT MY ADU?

- An ADU requires a building permit to be considered a legal dwelling unit; this includes a legal existing structure that has been converted to a dwelling without a permit (for example: converting a garage into an ADU)
- Reduces health & safety risks
- Increases property value
- Reduces potential liabilities as some home insurance policies do not cover unpermitted ADUs
- Minimizes risk of potential repercussions associated with complaints from tenants or neighbors

## CONTACT US

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## THE STEPS

### APPLICATION & REVIEW

- 1 Inquire at the Planning and Economic Development Department to determine if an ADU is an allowable use on the property in question, and the associated applicable building and fire code requirements. **This inquiry will not result in code enforcement action.**
- 2 Submitting the building permit application with applicable fees and plans initiates the permit process. The applicant coordinates with Building Division staff to submit existing plans reflecting the entire project. Plans must be drawn to scale and include site plan, floor plans, foundation plans, framing plans, exterior elevations, electrical, mechanical and plumbing plans. The plans are then checked for consistency with Building and Fire Code requirements. Additional or revised plans may need to be submitted to address City Code requirements.

### INSPECTIONS

- 3 Once the plans pass review and fees are paid, the building permit is issued. The structure must then be inspected for consistency with Codes. A City inspector will determine finish covering removal and testing requirements at the first inspection.

Building features that require inspection include but are not limited to foundation elements, wall framing, electrical outlets, natural gas piping, HVAC system, insulation, plumbing, electrical or mechanical elements. When the structure passes inspection, the permit becomes final and occupancy is approved.

