

# HANDOUT

## **Attached And Detached Accessory Dwelling Units aka**

**GRANNY UNITS  
MOTHER-IN-LAW QUARTERS  
CARRIAGE HOUSES**

**PERMITS+PLUS  
ZONE**

**Washoe County  
Permits Plus Zone**  
1001 East Ninth Street  
PO Box 11130  
Reno, NV 89520-0027



## **What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit and Can I Build One?**

### **Definition.**

The common term for a detached or attached accessory dwelling unit is a “Granny Unit” or “In-Law Quarters.” This is commonly defined as an independent dwelling unit that is added onto, or created within, a single-family house. It may also be a smaller dwelling unit separated from the main dwelling unit on the same property. Each unit commonly has a separate kitchen, bathing and sleeping area. Often, these units are occupied by elderly persons with the main house occupied by close relatives or friends. This option provides economic, social and security benefits, since it allows older people to live independently but close to people who are concerned about their well-being. However, the Washoe County Development Code does not require that the unit be solely occupied by elderly family members. The unit could also be used for a younger family member who is ready to live independently or other extended family members. Additionally these units may provide housing for maids/butlers or other household staff, grooms, ranch hands, or other support staff for the main dwelling unit. In some cases the units are rented to non-family members or converted to rentals after the initial use is no longer required.

### **Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit.**

An attached accessory dwelling unit may also be described as an accessory apartment. These units may be constructed on most residential lots in Washoe County simply with a building permit. However, there are certain planning standards which must be met.

- A main residential unit exists or is planned to be built with the accessory unit,
- The property has a minimum lot area of 5,000 square feet,
- The setbacks and height standards of the zoning shall be maintained,
- The attached accessory unit shall not be more than twenty-five (25) percent of the size of the main house (do not count the garage in this computation,)
- The front door of the main home and the accessory unit must be on different sides of the structure,
- A minimum of one (1) off-street parking space shall be added, in addition to the two parking spaces (one must be an enclosed garage) required for the main residence, and
- There shall be not more than one (1) attached or detached accessory dwelling unit per parcel.

An attached accessory dwelling unit may be separated from the main dwelling by a garage or other non-habitable space between the two units. However, there may be only one structure and a breezeway does not constitute an attachment. So, for example, you could have the main dwelling, the attached garage, and then the attached accessory dwelling. Remember, however, the front door to the attached accessory dwelling cannot be on the same side of the building as the main dwelling’s front door.

### **Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit.**

Detached accessory dwellings are allowed in most residential and rural zones, subject to a special use permit reviewed by the Board of Adjustment with the following requirements:

- A main residential unit exists or is planned to be built with the accessory unit,

- There is a minimum lot area of one (1) acre,
- Setback and height standards of the regulatory zone shall be maintained, two stories are allowed,
- The detached accessory unit shall be at least six hundred forty (640) square feet, but shall not exceed twelve hundred (1,200) square feet, or fifty (50) percent of the floor area of the main unit, whichever is less and no variances to this standard are allowed,
- A manufactured home may be permitted as a detached accessory dwelling under certain circumstances,
- A minimum of one (1) off-street parking space shall be added, in addition to the two parking spaces (one must be an enclosed garage) required for the main residence, and
- There shall be not more than one (1) attached or detached accessory dwelling unit per parcel.

If you are planning a recreation room, pool house, or other detached structure that contains more than two plumbing fixtures, a special use permit will be required for a detached accessory dwelling, as a separate structure with a full bathroom can be easily converted by the next owner into a dwelling unit. If, however, it is a small recreation room or pool house under 320 square feet and has a common architecturally designed roofline, the small structure may be considered a “casita.” Please see the “Casita” handout to see if your project fits that definition.

### **Caution – Is Your Property on Septic or Well??**

If your property is not on both community water and sewer systems, the District Health Department should be contacted regarding your proposed project. There may be additional considerations. In some cases the existing septic system must be enlarged or a second septic system established. Repair fields may require enlargement or a second repair field may need to be established. These requirements may necessitate a larger piece of property to fit all the requirements on the lot. The State Water Engineer has determined that no additional water rights are required, but the District Health Department may require additional verification if one well is proposed to service two separate residences. So, a separate visit regarding your specific property is certainly warranted before you get too far down the road on your project.

### **How to Establish an Allowed Use**

To establish an allowed use, an attached accessory dwelling, simply follow the development standards for the land use designation applicable to your property and apply for a building permit. However, remember to follow all the standards in this brochure and visit with a planner if you have any questions.

### **How to Establish a Special Use**

When you plan on constructing a detached accessory dwelling, you will need a Special Use Permit prior to submittal for a building permit. The “special use” requires discretionary approval by the Board of Adjustment. The review is mandatory to determine if the dwelling can be constructed at the proposed location without imposing a burden on neighbors or the surrounding community. Additionally, a special use permit application is reviewed at your local Citizen Advisory Board. A separate brochure is available that explains the application and processing of a special use permit and the accompanying Citizen Advisory Board involvement.

## **Who Reviews Special Use Permit Applications?**

Special use permits are initially reviewed by various agencies within the county, state and federal agencies. For example, each request must comply with the Washoe County engineering standards for drainage and grading, international fire codes and District Health Department ordinances. Other agencies and organizations that will review your application include your area's Citizen Advisory Board (CAB), utility companies, the Airport Authority and, in some instances, state and federal agencies. The recommendations and conditions of all the reviewing agencies and the citizen advisory board are compiled by the assigned case planner.

This information, in combination with the planner's professional skill in crafting conditions to mitigate potential incompatibility and the planner's knowledge of Washoe County Development Code, land use law and court decisions, results in a recommendation of approval with conditions or denial to the reviewing body. In the case of a detached accessory dwelling, the planner and reviewing agencies are reviewing architectural compatibility, drainage patterns, access, lighting, views of adjacent properties and the like. Each property is different. Decisions are rendered after the public testimony is presented at a public hearing. All decisions of the Board of Adjustment may be appealed to the Board of County Commissioners.

## **Additional Costs**

There are certain fees that you should add into your budget. A Residential Park Fee and a Regional Road Impact Fee for the accessory dwelling will be collected at the time of issuance of the building permit. Additionally, utility hook-up fees may be required. These fees are typically the same as for a multi-family apartment.

## **Questions Regarding Attached and Detached Accessory Dwellings**

A variety of additional brochures are available to help you through the building permit process, for example "Plans Submittal Requirements" for a single family dwelling or addition. If you have any questions regarding establishing an accessory dwelling unit or need assistance please call the Department of Community Development at 328-6100. The Community Development staff will be able to answer any questions you may have and provide you with any necessary information you may need. In addition, if you have internet access, please visit our web site at [www.washoecounty.us/ComDev](http://www.washoecounty.us/ComDev).

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