

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) in Portola Valley

What is an ADU?

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is a small house located on a residential lot in addition to a main house. An ADU can be either attached to another building or detached. Either way, the ADU can be converted from existing space within a home or an existing accessory building, or can be built new. For more information, see the ADU ordinance in Section 18.12.040 of the Portola Valley Municipal Code.

Can you have an ADU on your property?

To have an external/attached ADU on your property in Portola Valley, your parcel must be at least one acre in size, have a main house on it, and be located in a residential zoning district. You can have an internal ADU in any residential zoning district

External ADUs count towards the property's overall allowable floor area and impervious surface. You will be responsible for ensuring the existing buildings and potential ADU do not exceed the total amount of allowable floor area or impervious surface for your parcel.

Town Regulations

The town has standards and requirements for ADUs to ensure that the structures are compatible with existing development and neighboring uses. The table on the back of this sheet summarizes the main standards.

Other requirements could apply to your project if, for example, your property is located in a floodplain, has unstable soils, or if there is a significant tree near the proposed location of the ADU.

Design Review

Depending on the size, type and location of the ADU, you may be able to get permit approval from town staff, or you may need design review approval from the Architectural and Site Control Commission (ASCC). The box below explains when a project will need ASCC approval; all other projects can be approved by staff.

ADUs that Need ASCC Approval

- External/Detached ADUs over 1,000 square feet in size
- ADUs taller than 18' or with maximum overall height greater than 24'
- ADUs visible from a local scenic corridor
- ADUs that do not have colors, materials and architecture similar to the main house

Green Building

All projects are subject to the requirements of the Portola Valley Green Building Ordinance.

Sample Green Building Practices

- Minimize disturbance of plants & trees
- Seal duct openings during construction
- Install overhangs and gutters
- Use durable and non-combustible siding materials
- Use insulation with 75% recycled content

Summary of Town of Portola Valley Standards for External/Attached ADUs

ITEM	REQUIREMENT			
Maximum floor area – External/Attached	Parcel Size	1-1.99 acres	2-3.49 acres	>3.5 acres
	Max ADU Size	1,000 SF x 1 unit	1,200 SF x 1 unit	1,500 SF x 1 unit or 1,000 SF x 2 units
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,200 sq ft (no exterior wall changes) 			
Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Story 18’ max vertical building height* and 24’ max overall building height* • Two Story 28’ max vertical building height and 34’ max overall building height • ADUs over 18’ max vertical building height and 24’ max overall building height require the approval of the ASCC <p>* Vertical building height is the distance between the natural ground level, or the building pad if it was excavated (whichever is lower) to the highest part of the building directly above.</p> <p>* Maximum overall building height is the distance between the lowest point of contact with the finished ground surface and the highest point of the building.</p>			
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 parking space • Required parking spaces for the ADU do not have to be covered and can be provided as tandem spaces (behind other required parking, such as in a driveway) • No additional parking space is required if the ADU is created by conversion of existing space within the main dwelling unit 			
Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varies - The required front, side and rear yards vary depending on the size of the parcel and the zoning combining district within which the parcel is located; work with staff. 			
Color Light Reflectivity Value (LRV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main body finish - 40% or less • Trims - 50% or less • Roof - 50% or less 			
Occupancy and Rental Restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ADU shall have the same address as the main dwelling • ADUs may not be sold separately from the main dwelling • Either the ADU or the main dwelling shall be owner occupied. If the ADU is rented, any such rental shall not be for a term of less than 30 days 			