



ACCESSORY
DWELLING
UNIT
DESIGN
STANDARDS
FOR
HISTORIC
PROPERTIES

Accessory Dwelling Unit Standards & Criteria

Introduction

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are a valuable tool in addressing housing needs while supporting the character and livability of existing neighborhoods. In Sacramento's historic districts and on landmark-designated properties, new ADUs must be carefully designed to respect the architectural character, spatial patterns, and historic integrity of these important cultural resources.

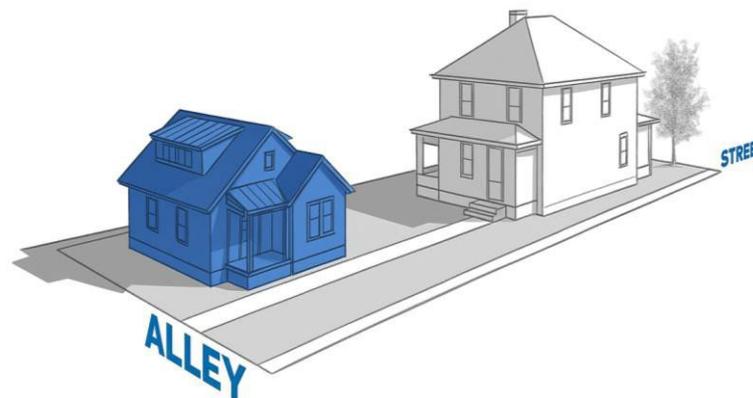
This document articulates objective design standards that apply to detached ADUs historic districts and on landmark-designated properties (Historic ADU Standards). The Historic ADU Standards are intended to provide clear, predictable direction for property owners and designers, ensuring that new development complements the surrounding historic context.

The City of Sacramento is a Certified Local Government (CLG) under the California Office of Historic Preservation and has adopted local ordinances and design guidelines to manage change in historic areas. The Historic ADU Standards supplement the citywide residential design standards and are consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. They provide a pathway for new ADUs that respect the unique qualities of Sacramento's historic neighborhoods while meeting State housing mandates.

Note: Alterations to primary historic structures (e.g., attached ADUs) or detached ADUs are not addressed by these standards; instead, those alterations are subject to the City's Site Plan and Design Review (SPDR) process.

Note: The Historic ADU Standards apply to ADUs located in historic districts and on landmark-designated properties and are intended to supplement the base ADU development standards contained in Section 17.228.105.B of the City Code. Where a conflict exists between the provisions of Section 17.228.105.B and the Historic ADU Standards, the Historic ADU Standards prevail.

FIGURE 1: THE MINISTERIAL REVIEW PROCESS ONLY APPLIES TO DETACHED ADUs. MODIFICATIONS TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS ARE SUBJECT TO DISCRETIONARY REVIEW.



Regulatory Framework for ADUs in Historic Districts

California Government Code Article 2 (Sections 66300–66403) mandates that local agencies allow ADUs and junior ADUs through a ministerial review process, meaning approval is required without a discretionary process or public hearing. Within that framework, Government Code Section 66314 authorizes local governments to adopt objective design standards to regulate the development of ADUs.

The Historic ADU Standards supplement the City’s ADU regulations in City Code section 17.228.105.B. Applicants may choose to proceed under the City’s local ADU standards or, alternatively, the streamlined standards provided under Government Code Section 66323. In either case, the local standards do not override state-mandated allowances under Government Code Section 66323.

In addition to zoning and building code requirements, the City has adopted historic district plans which include design guidelines specific to each historic district that provide further context and guidance for development involving historically significant properties. The Historic ADU Standards apply ministerially to ADUs proposed in historic districts and on landmark-designated properties and are intended to ensure compliance with applicable state laws while supporting local preservation goals through the application of objective design criteria.

Ministerial Review Process for ADUs

All ADUs, including those located on historic properties or within historic districts, are reviewed ministerially through the building permit process. This means that no discretionary review or public hearing is required. State law prohibits a separate planning or zoning approval before submitting a building permit application.

However, applicants may choose to submit an optional zoning review application prior to permit submittal. This optional, low-cost review allows Planning staff to verify zoning compliance—such as setbacks, height, and lot coverage—before applicants invest in full construction drawings. This step is recommended for applicants seeking early feedback on how historic district standards may affect their project.

If the project is not consistent with objective standards, the applicant may:

- Revise the project to comply with the standards, or
- Submit a SPDR application to deviate from an objective standards, a discretionary process requiring Planning approval. If approved, the project will then proceed through Building Plan Review before a permit is issued.

Design Principle

Maintaining and improving the design aesthetic of Sacramento's historic districts and landmarks while also allowing for new infill development. Construction of new detached ADUs shall be compatible with existing historical resources to preserve the character of historic properties while increasing density or accommodating the property owner's needs.

New ADU construction shall be carefully and thoughtfully designed to demonstrate an understanding of the property's historic context, architectural styles and features, and pattern of spatial arrangements. Inspiration shall be drawn from the defining features of the primary dwelling and/or closest contributing resource whenever possible.



FIGURE 2: ADU DESIGNS SHOULD ADD TEXTURE, CHARACTER, AND LIVABILITY TO THE CITY'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Rationale for Objective Design Standards for ADUs within Historic Districts and Landmarks:

The development of objective design standards for ADUs in historic districts and on landmark-designated properties helps strike a balance between encouraging housing production and preserving Sacramento's historic fabric. The Historic ADU Standards ensure that new ADUs are compatible in scale, form, and materials with existing historic properties while supporting broader City goals for livability and sustainability.

The Historic ADU Standards also advance key goals and policies of the Sacramento 2040 General Plan. They support a compact, infill-focused development pattern that reduces vehicle miles traveled and supports resource efficiency (Policy LUP-1.1). These objective standards ensure that new ADUs in historic districts will be oriented towards the public realm when site conditions allow (Policy LUP-4.8). They ensure that new infill development complements the scale and pattern of existing neighborhoods, including those with historic designations (Policy LUP-8.10). The Historic ADU Standards are specifically designed to guide new construction in a way that is compatible with historic resources, addressing issues such as massing and scale within a ministerial review framework (Policy HCR-1.3).

By grounding the Historic ADU Standards in adopted General Plan policies, the City reinforces its dual objectives: expanding housing opportunities and preserving Sacramento's rich historic sites.



FIGURE 3: ADUs PROVIDE AN ECONOMICAL SOLUTION TO CREATE MORE DENSITY WITHIN EXISTING AND HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Standards for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Development Involving Historic Properties

1. Location

Appropriate placement of ADUs is critical to preserving the spatial organization and character of historic properties and districts. These standards support context-sensitive infill that enhances site functionality while avoiding adverse impacts on contributing historic resources.

1.1 Minimum Separation from Historic Resources

On parcels greater than 100 feet deep, a minimum of 30 feet of separation is required between the ADU and contributing resource on the same parcel. If the parcel is 100 feet deep or less, a minimum of 4 feet is required between the ADU and the contributing resource on the same parcel, or any adjacent parcel.

1.2 Alley-Fronting ADUs

For parcels with alley frontage, detached ADUs must be constructed no more than 5 feet from the alley property line to reinforce alley-facing development patterns typical in Sacramento's historic districts.

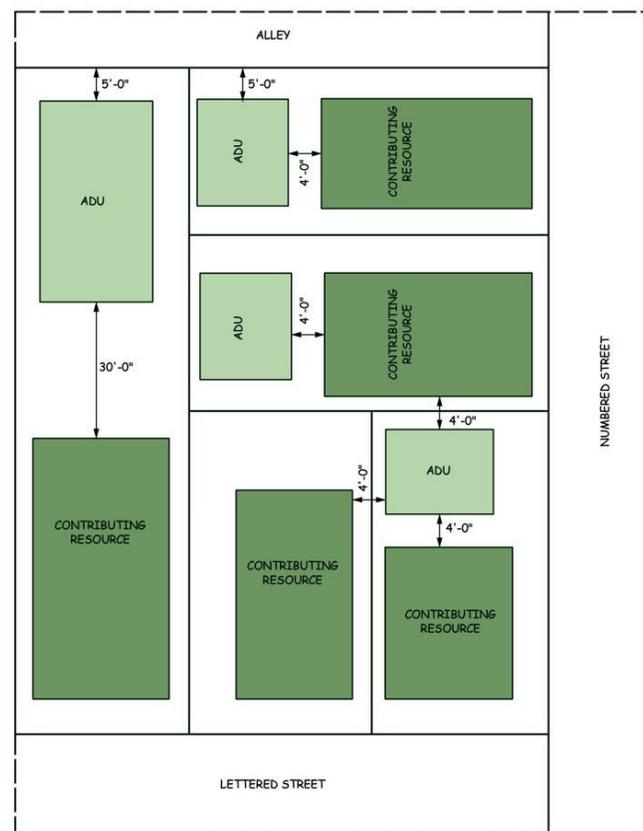


FIGURE 4: DISTANCE REQUIRED BETWEEN ADUs AND CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN THE CENTRAL CITY FIGURE SHOWS A TYPICAL LOT IN THE CENTRAL CITY WITH 40' x 160' OR 40' x 80' LOTS.

1.3 Front Yard ADUs

Detached ADUs must be located entirely behind the rear façade of the primary dwelling and within the rear yard area. A rear yard is considered adequate for this purpose if it contains a minimum clear area of 800 square feet that meets setback requirements for a detached ADU, including a minimum 4-foot side and rear setback.

If a parcel does not contain a rear yard area meeting this minimum standard—defined as an unobstructed area of at least 20 feet wide by 40 feet deep, clear of permanent structures and exclusive of required setbacks—an ADU may be located forward of the rear façade of the primary structure. In such cases, the detached ADU must:

- Be located behind the front yard setback required by the base zoning district;
- Not extend beyond the midpoint of the parcel, measured halfway between the two side property lines (Figure 5);
- Comply with all other applicable development and objective design standards.

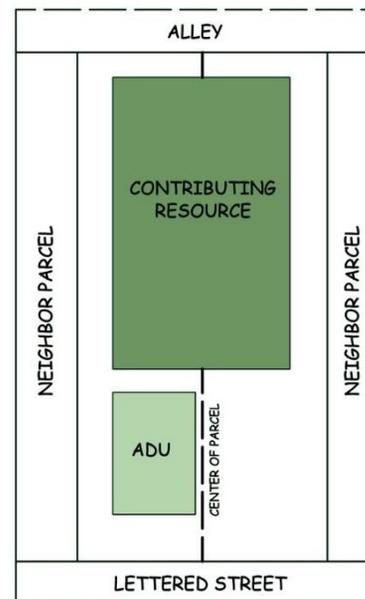


FIGURE 5: AN ADU IN THE FRONT YARD MUST NOT PASS THE CENTERLINE OF THE PARCEL.

2. Size and Height Limits

These standards aim to facilitate the responsible integration of ADUs while safeguarding the integrity and character of historic properties by prioritizing compatibility, proportionality, and contextual sensitivity. ADUs must comply with the size and height standards set forth and the following to avoid an adverse impact on the historic property.

2.1 Additional Height

- ADUs must not be more than 150% taller than any contributing resource or landmark structure on the same or adjacent parcel (two parcels are adjacent if they share a rear or side property line), measured from the lowest plate height of any adjacent contributing resource or landmark.

2.2 Width

- New ADUs must not be wider than the contributing resource on the same parcel.

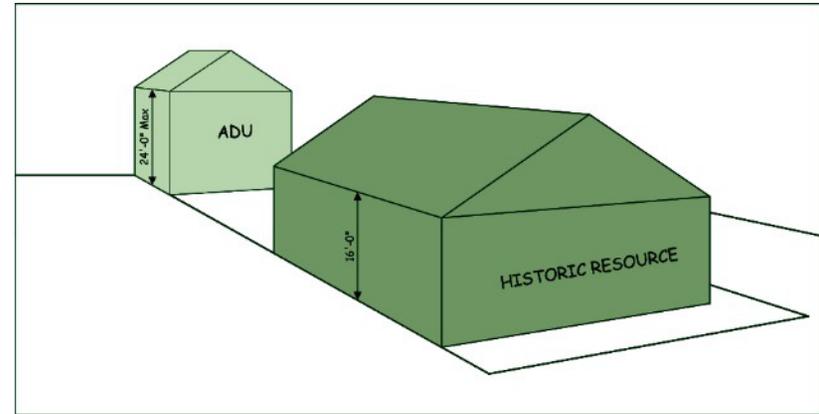


FIGURE 6: ADU MAY BE A MAXIMUM OF 150% OF THE HEIGHT OF THE HISTORIC BUILDING ON THE SAME PARCEL OR ANY ADJACENT PARCEL. FOR EXAMPLE: 16' TALL HISTORIC BUILDING X 150% = 24' TALL ADU.

3. ADU Design Standards

3.1 Roofs

- The roof form of a detached ADU must be the same general type (e.g., gabled, hipped, flat, shed, or combination) as the predominant roof form of the primary dwelling on the parcel if the primary dwelling is a contributing resource or landmark; if the primary dwelling is not a contributing resource or landmark, the roof form must be the same general type as the predominant roof form of any primary dwelling that is a contributing resource or landmark on an adjacent parcel.
- A roof form is considered to "match" when it shares the same type, orientation, and slope range (within ± 10 degrees) as the reference structure.
- Flat roofs are allowed only if the primary structure has a flat roof as its predominant roof form (i.e., covering at least 60% of its roof area).

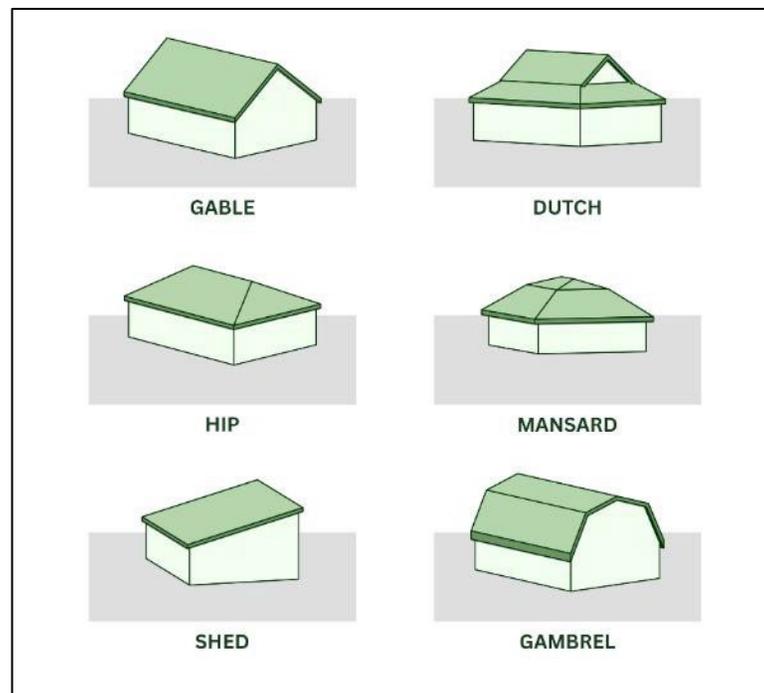


FIGURE 7: COMMON ROOF FORMS FOUND IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

3.2 Walls and Cladding

- Wall cladding on ADUs must be one of the following traditional horizontal or vertical siding profiles: bevel, narrow lap, Dolly Varden, shingle, clapboard, Dutch lap, channel rustic, board-and-batten, shiplap, tongue-and-groove, rustic vee, or other traditional profile that is visually consistent with the siding on the contributing resource or landmark on the same parcel (or adjacent parcel if there isn't a contributing resource or landmark on the same parcel). A siding profile is considered visually consistent if it matches the contributing resource/landmark in orientation (horizontal or vertical), exposure width (within ± 1 inch), and surface texture (smooth or rough-sawn).
- Stucco or brick may be permitted only if the contributing resource or landmark or adjacent on the same parcel (or adjacent parcel if there isn't a contributing resource or landmark on the same parcel) has stucco/brick cladding as its primary exterior wall finish. The stucco/brick on the ADU must match the texture (e.g., smooth, dash, lace), color (within one Munsell or equivalent color range), and application technique of the historic stucco on the reference building.
- Siding materials must be wood or fiber cement with a smooth or textured finish that replicates traditional wood grain. Vinyl, aluminum, and T-1-11 siding types are prohibited.

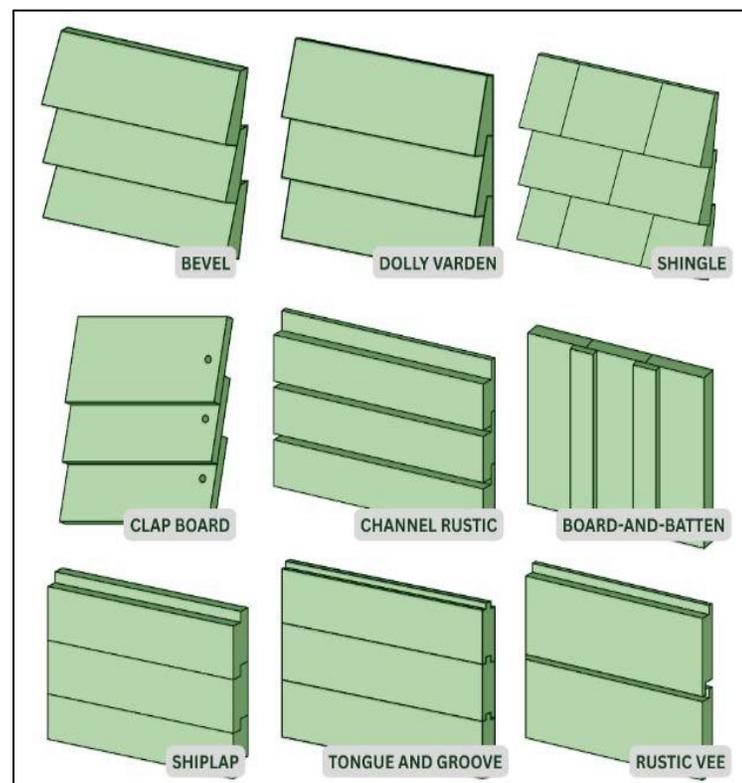


FIGURE 8: EXAMPLES OF TRADITIONAL SIDING PROFILES.

3.3 Trim and Finish Materials

- All trim must have a smooth finish with no raised grain greater than 1/16 of an inch.
- Window and door trim must be flat and not exceed 4 inches in width.
- Applied ornamentation, including brackets, spindles, scrollwork, or molded trim profiles, shall not be used on ADUs.

3.4 Windows

- Windows must be double- or single-hung, hopper, awning, fixed, or casement style.
- Sliding windows and internal grids are prohibited.
- Windows must include exterior trim and sills on all elevations. Trim must be a minimum of 3.5 inches wide and project at least 0.75 inches from the wall plane. Sills must project a minimum of 1.75 inches from the wall surface and be sloped to shed water.
- Trim and sills must be constructed of wood or fiber cement, or another paintable material with a smooth finish.

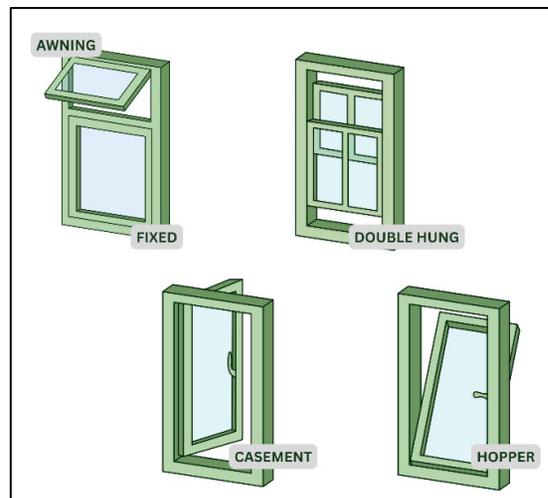


FIGURE 9: ALLOWED WINDOW TYPES.



FIGURE 10: WINDOWS MUST HAVE SILL AND TRIM PROFILE AS SHOWN.

3.5 Doors

- Exterior pedestrian doors must be paneled.
- Flush panel doors are prohibited in the Central City.
- Sliding doors are not allowed on a building elevation facing a public street or alley.
- Garage doors must be paneled and have viewing windows. Viewing windows must be clear glass, opaque, or one-way glazing.



Figure 11: FIGURE 10: EXAMPLE OF PANELED DOORS. OTHER CONFIGURATIONS ARE ACCEPTABLE.

3.6 Entrances

- For ADUs with façades fronting a public street or alley, the primary pedestrian entrance must face the public right-of-way.

Alternatively, the entrance may face a side yard if all of the following conditions are met:

- The side yard has a minimum clear width of 5 feet, and
- A permanent paved pathway, at least 3 feet in width, connects the entrance directly to a public right-of-way without obstruction.
- For alley-facing ADUs with façades that include garage doors, the pedestrian door may be located on the same façade as the garage door, if the entrance is located within 5 feet of the garage opening.
- Pedestrian doors must remain visibly accessible from the public right-of-way. Fences or gates in front of a door facing a public right-of-way must be no taller than 42 inches and must not form an opaque barrier.



FIGURE 12: EXAMPLE OF PANELED GARAGE DOOR WITH VIEWING WINDOWS. WINDOWS MAY BE FAUX OR ONE-WAY VIEWING WINDOWS.

4. Site Features and Building Services

The placement and configuration of site features such as mechanical equipment, utilities, lighting, and access points can significantly affect the character and visual integrity of historic properties. These standards are intended to ensure that essential modern systems are integrated in ways that are discreet, context-sensitive, and compatible with the historic setting. All building services must be designed and located to minimize visibility from the public right-of-way and avoid detracting from character-defining features of the primary resource or surrounding district.

4.1 Mechanical Equipment

- “Mechanical equipment” refers to equipment serving the building, including HVAC condensers, heat pumps, air handlers, and electric panels. This does not include public utility infrastructure located in a designated utility easement.
- All mechanical equipment must be located at ground level, unless installed on a flat roof and fully concealed from public view by a parapet or similar architectural screening.
- Ground-mounted mechanical equipment must be located behind the primary façade or in a side yard, and screened from public view when seen from the adjacent street or alley using solid fencing that forms an opaque barrier or evergreen landscaping at least as tall as the equipment.

- Window-mounted mechanical equipment visible from the public right-of-way, including alleys, is prohibited unless fully concealed by a solid wall.
- Air handlers must be located entirely within the building envelope.
- The location of all exterior mechanical equipment must be shown on the site plan and building elevation drawings to confirm appropriate screening and compliance with visibility standards.



FIGURE 13: WINDOW MOUNTED AIR CONDITIONERS MUST NOT BE VISIBLE FROM THE PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY. EXPOSED PIPING OR CONDUIT IS PROHIBITED.

4.2 Utilities and Building Systems

- No exposed piping or conduit is allowed on exterior walls.
- Electrical risers must be installed within the building envelope.
- Ogee-style or round gutters are required for ADUs located within the Central City.

4.3 Solar Energy Systems

- Solar panels must be mounted in a manner visually integrated with the roof (e.g., mounted flush or low-profile), but installation will not be denied or restricted based solely on design unless substantial evidence demonstrates a specific, adverse impact on public health or safety, in accordance with California Government Code § 65850.5.



FIGURE 14: SOLAR PANELS SHALL BE MOUNTED PARALLEL WITH THE ROOF.

4.4 Exterior Lighting

- All exterior doors must be accompanied by an exterior light fixture.
- Entrance door light fixtures adjacent to the street or alley must operate dusk to dawn via photovoltaic sensor or timer.

4.5 Parking and Access Control

- Tuck-under or cantilevered parking configurations are prohibited.
- No new uncovered parking areas are allowed along alleys.
- For parcels that do not front an alley, no new curb cuts may be added for ADU-related parking.
- New parking areas must be within an enclosed garage.

Note: These standards apply only when an applicant voluntarily chooses to provide off-street parking.



FIGURE 15: TUCK-UNDER AND UNCOVERED PARKING IS PROHIBITED ON ALLEYS WHEN ASSOCIATED WITH A NEW ADU.

5.0 Alley-Facing Design Requirements

Alley-facing ADUs contribute to the active use, safety, and historic continuity of Sacramento's urban alley network. These standards are intended to reinforce the traditional development patterns found in historic neighborhoods, where secondary units and service structures directly engage the alley. By requiring minimal setbacks, operable openings, and appropriately detailed garage doors, the guidelines promote alley frontages that are visually interesting, pedestrian-scaled, and compatible with the surrounding historic context. Design treatments must ensure that alley-facing elevations support a coherent streetscape while respecting the form and materials of contributing buildings on the parcel or within the district.

1.0 Alley-ADU Interface

- To support historic development patterns in Sacramento's urban neighborhoods, ADUs facing alleys must:
 - Be set back no more than 5 feet from the alley property line.
 - Include at least two operable windows facing the alley.
 - Include one operable door on the ground level facing the alley. Operable door may be a garage door or pedestrian door. Sliding doors facing the alley are prohibited.
 - When garage doors face the alley, must be paneled with glazed upper sections.



FIGURE 16: EXAMPLE CONCEPT OF AN ALLEY-FRONTING ADU.