



ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT HISTORIC STANDARDS

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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.

The following objective design standards apply to detached ADUs on properties listed as historic landmarks or located within designated historic districts. These standards are intended to provide clear, predictable direction for property owners and designers, ensuring that new development complements the surrounding historic context.

Regulatory Context: California Government Code Sections 65852.2 and 66314 require local governments to allow ADUs on residential properties through a ministerial (non-discretionary) review process and authorize jurisdictions to adopt objective design standards that regulate the placement, scale, and appearance of ADUs. Such standards may address historic preservation concerns, including compatibility with properties listed in or eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources.

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. These 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: ADUs that are attached to a primary historic structure are not eligible for ministerial approval and are subject to discretionary review through the City's Site Plan and Design Review (SPDR) process.



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

Objective Design Requirements for Accessory Dwelling Units on Landmark Parcels or within a Historic District

City of Sacramento

Ministerial Review Process for ADUs

All Accessory Dwelling Units (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. A separate planning or zoning approval is not required 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 the project for Site Plan and Design Review (SPDR), 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

Objective Design Requirements for Accessory Dwelling Units on Landmark Parcels or within a Historic District

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

Sacramento's historic districts and landmarks serve as instrumental features of Sacramento's architectural heritage, capturing design aesthetics across different periods. As these properties face the pressing demand for housing solutions, it becomes imperative to balance preserving their unique character and accommodating contemporary needs. The objective design standards for ADUs for historic properties aim to achieve this delicate balance. By preserving the historic nature, these standards ensure that new constructions blend in with the existing architecture, safeguarding the historical character of Sacramento.



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

Objective Design Requirements for Accessory Dwelling Units on Landmark Parcels or within a Historic District

City of Sacramento

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

1.0 Location. Appropriate placement of Accessory Dwelling Units (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-foot depth, a minimum of 30-foot separation is required between the ADU and contributing resource on the same parcel. If the parcel is 100-foot deep or less a minimum of 4-foot 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 reduce their visibility from the street and reinforce alley-facing development patterns typical in Sacramento's historic districts.

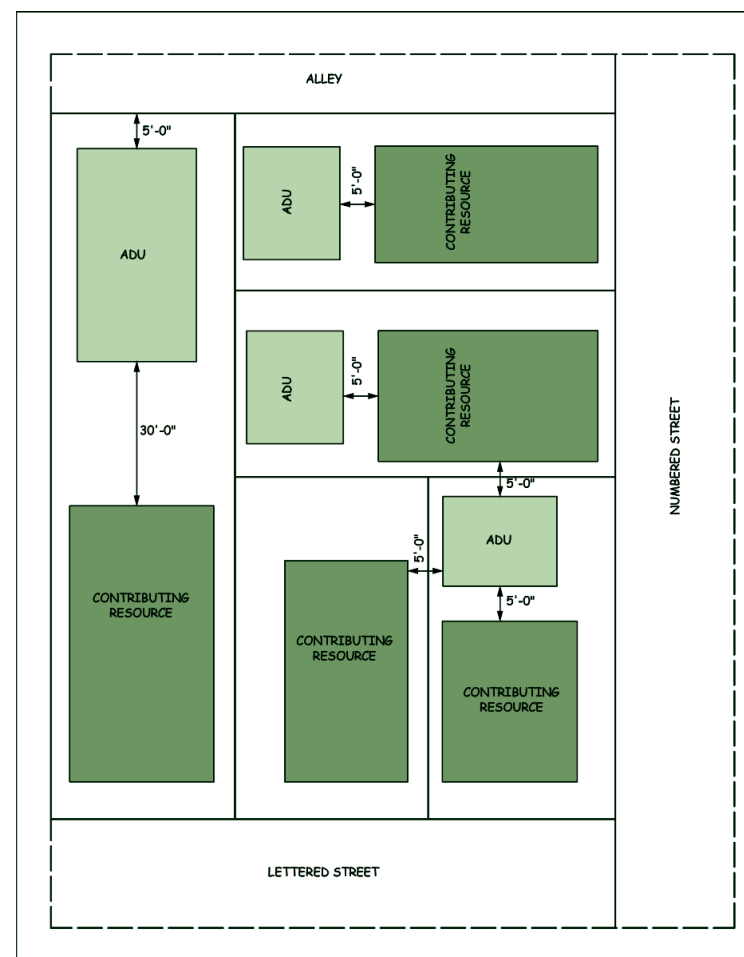


FIGURE 4: DISTANCE REQUIRED BETWEEN ADUS AND CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN THE CENTRAL CITY

Objective Design Requirements for Accessory Dwelling Units on Landmark Parcels or within a Historic District

City of Sacramento

1.3 General Placement on the Lot

- Detached ADUs must be located in the rear half of the lot, unless existing lot conditions preclude this placement or the ADU is a conversion of an existing legal nonconforming structure.
- ADUs are generally not allowed in the front yard, defined as the area between the front façade of the primary dwelling and the front property line. Exceptions to front yard placement may be considered only if:
 - The lot lacks access to a rear or side yard sufficient for ADU development of at least 800 square feet; and
 - The ADU does not block the primary façade of the contributing resource by more than 50% when viewed from 20-feet back from the front property line, standing half way between either side lot line.

1.4 Setbacks and Site Relationships

ADUs must comply with minimum four-foot setbacks from side and rear property lines.

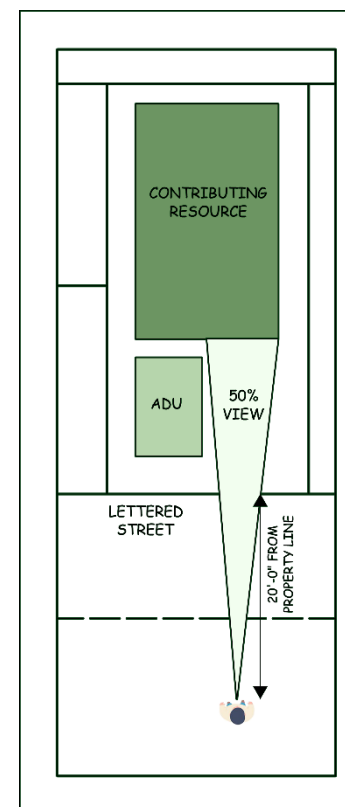


FIGURE 5: WHEN STANDING IN THE CENTER POINT IN FRONT OF THE PARCEL, AN ADU IN THE FRONT YARD MUST NOT BLOCK MORE THAN 50% OF THE PRIMARY FAÇADE OF THE CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE

2.0 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 shall 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 are to be no taller than 150% of any adjacent contributing resource or landmark on the same parcel or any adjacent parcel within a historic district, measured from the lowest plate height of any adjacent contributing resource or landmark.

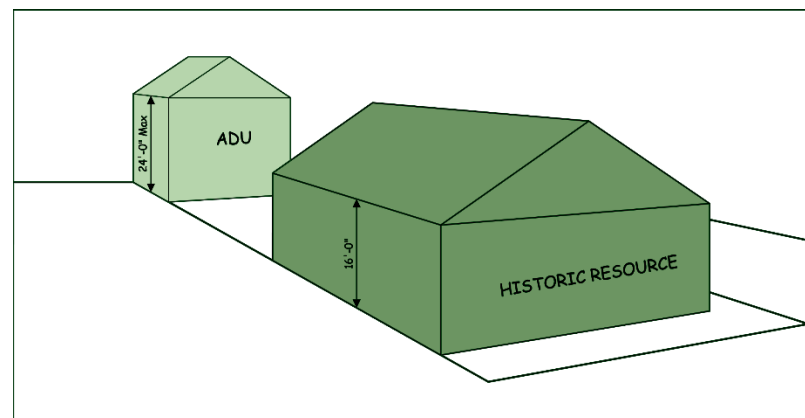


FIGURE 3: ADU MAY BE A MAXIMUM OF 150% OF THE HEIGHT OF THE HISTORIC BUILDING ON THE SAME PARCEL OR ANY ADJACENT PARCEL. FOR EXAMPLE: 16' TALL HISTORIC BUILDING X 150% = 24' TALL ADU.

3.0 ADU Design Standards for Historic Properties

These objective design standards apply to the construction of detached Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on properties listed as historic landmarks or located within historic districts in the City of Sacramento. They are intended to ensure compatibility with historic context and maintain architectural integrity, while allowing for new housing opportunities. Attached ADUs are considered modifications to a historic structure and are subject to discretionary review under the Site Plan and Design Review (SPDR) process. They are not eligible for ministerial approval.

3.1 Roofs

- Roof forms should generally reflect the predominant form of the primary dwelling on the parcel or adjacent parcels.
- Gabled, hipped, or shed roofs may be used if compatible in slope and scale to the primary structure.
- Flat roofs may be permitted if they are a character-defining feature of the historic structure and incorporate parapets or articulation.

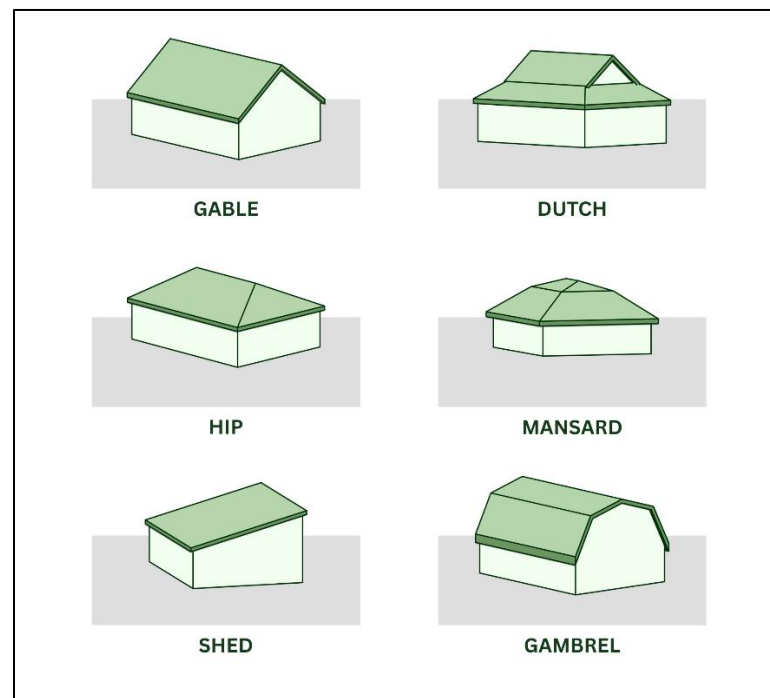


FIGURE 6: ROOF FORMS SHOULD GENERALLY REFLECT THE PREDOMINANT FORM OF THE PRIMARY DWELLING OR ADJACENT PARCELS

3.2 Walls and Cladding

- Wall cladding shall be traditional siding such as bevel, dolly varden, shingle, clap board, channel rustic, board-and-batten, shiplap, tongue and groove, rustic vee, or match the traditional siding found on the contributing resource.
- Stucco may be permitted if it matches the texture, color, and application technique of existing contributing buildings in the district and does not obscure architectural detail.
- Vinyl siding and T-1-11 siding types are prohibited.

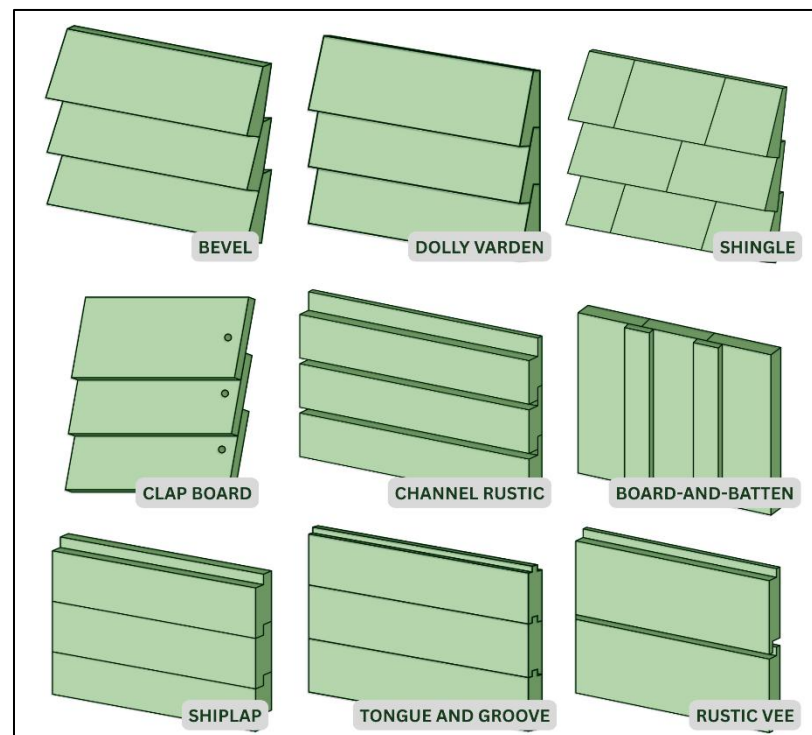


FIGURE 7: EXAMPLES OF TRADITIONAL SIDING PROFILES

3.3 Trim and Finish Materials

- All trim must have a smooth finish with no raised grain greater than 1/16 of an inch.
- Decorative detailing shall be minimal and compatible with the primary structure without mimicking historic ornamentation.

3.4 Windows

- Windows must be double- or single-hung, hopper, awning, fixed, or casement style.
- Windows with internal grids and no sills are prohibited.
- Windows must include exterior window sills and trim on all elevations.

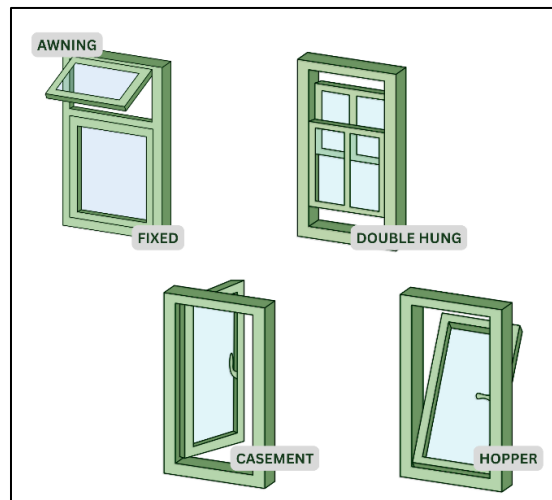


FIGURE 8: ALLOWED WINDOW TYPES INCLUDE AWNING, FIXED, DOUBLE HUNG, SINGLE HUNG, CASEMENT, OR HOPPER. SLIDING WINDOWS ARE NOT ALLOWED.



FIGURE 9: NEW WINDOW SHALL HAVE NO INTERNAL GRIDS, AND MUST HAVE SMOOTH FINISHED WINDOW SILL, AND TRIM PROFILE AS SHOWN.

3.5 Doors

- Doors must be paneled.
- Flush doors are prohibited in the Central City.
- Sliding doors are allowed if not visible from a public street or alley.
- Garage doors must be paneled and have viewing windows. Viewing windows may be opaque or one-way glazing.

3.6 Entrances

- Primary entrances must be located on a façade oriented toward the street, alley, or side yard, not facing the primary historic structure.



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



FIGURE 11: EXAMPLE OF PANELED GARAGE DOOR WITH VIEWING WINDOWS. WINDOWS MAY BE FAUX OR ONE-WAY VIEWING WINDOWS.

4.0 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

- All mechanical equipment must be located at ground level.
- Equipment must be placed behind the building or along side yards and screened from public view with solid fencing or landscaping.
- Window and roof-mounted HVAC equipment visible from the public right-of-way is prohibited.
- Heating and cooling air handlers shall be installed within the building envelope.
- Ground-mounted condensers and heat pumps are required and must be screened.
- Location of all mechanical equipment outside the building envelope shall be shown on site plan prior to approval.

4.2 Utilities and Building Systems

- No exposed piping or conduit is allowed on exterior walls.
- Ogee-style or round gutters are required for ADUs located within the Central City.

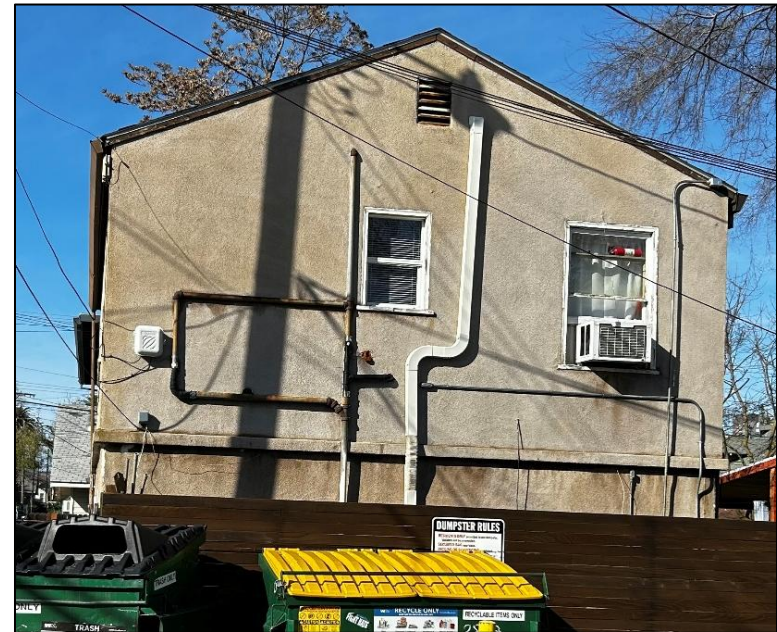


FIGURE 12: WINDOW MOUNTED AIR CONDITIONERS MUST NOT BE VISIBLE FROM THE PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY. EXPOSED PIPING OR CONDUIT IS PROHIBITED.

4.3 Solar Energy Systems

- Solar panels must be mounted parallel to the roof plane.
- No overhangs or alterations to the existing roof form are permitted when installing panels.

4.4 Exterior Lighting

- All exterior doors must be accompanied by a dark-sky compliant light fixture.
- Lighting must not spill onto adjacent private properties.

4.5 Parking and Access Control

- Tuck-under or cantilevered parking configurations are prohibited.
- No new uncovered parking areas are permitted along alleys.
- For parcels that do not front an alley, no new curb cuts shall be added for ADU-related parking.



FIGURE 13: SOLAR PANELS SHALL BE MOUNTED FLUSH WITH THE ROOF.

5.0 Alley-Facing Design Requirements

- 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 casement door. Sliding doors facing the alley are prohibited.
 - Garage doors, if included, must be raised panel with glazed upper sections.

6.0 Parking and Access

- No new uncovered surface parking may be established along alleys.
- Tuck-under parking or overhanging upper levels that create carports are prohibited unless they are screened from view by solid fencing and equipped with an automatic gate that does not encroach into the public right of way.
- No new curb cuts shall be provided for parcels that do not front alleys.
- Garage doors, if proposed, shall feature raised panels and windows in the uppermost panel.