



ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT DESIGN STANDARDS FOR HISTORIC PROPERTIES

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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.



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

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.

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

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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. 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. Sacramento's historic districts contain some of the City's densest and most diverse housing types, yet there is still room to grow. The alleys found in many historic districts in the Central City, which are historically utilitarian, can be a great resource in supporting additional housing in historic neighborhoods. The objective design standards for ADUs for historic properties aim to achieve this delicate balance. These standards ensure that new construction is compatible 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

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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.

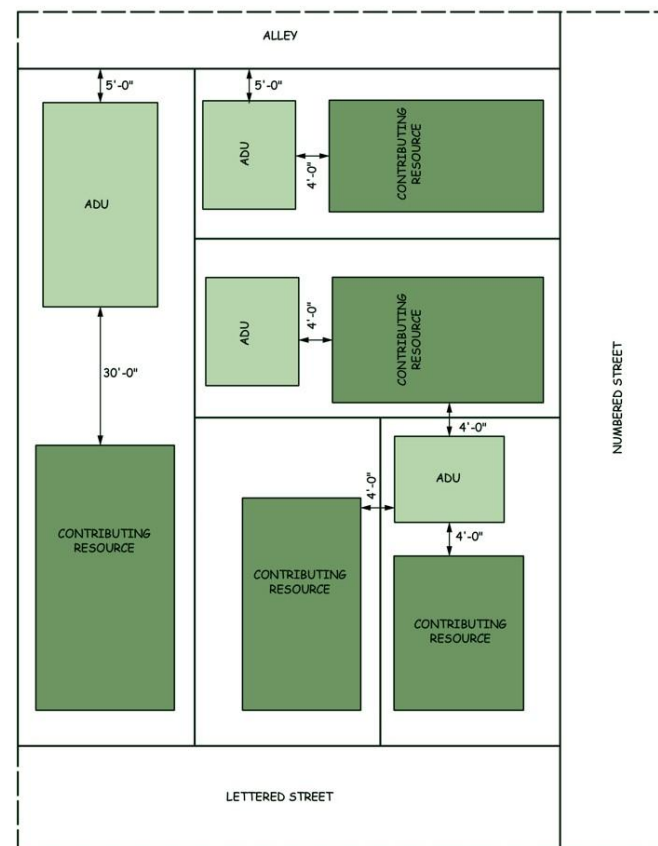


FIGURE 4: DISTANCE REQUIRED BETWEEN ADUS AND CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN THE CENTRAL CITY

1.3 Front Yard ADUs

- Detached ADUs must be located in the rear yard, 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 shall not extend over the centerline of the lot (Figure 5).

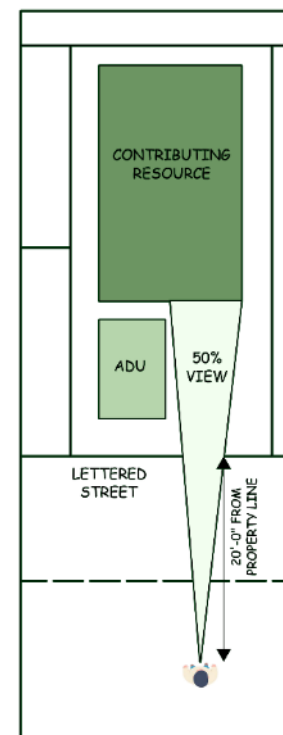


FIGURE 5: WHEN STANDING IN THE CENTER POINT IN FRONT OF THE PARCEL, AN ADU IN THE FRONT YARD MUST NOT BLOCK MORE THAN 50% OF THE PRIMARY FACADE OF THE CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE

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 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 contributing resource or landmark on the same parcel or adjoining parcel, measured from the lowest plate height of any adjacent contributing resource or landmark.

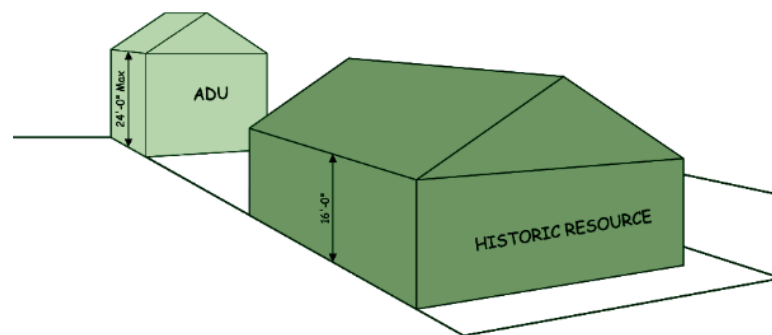


FIGURE 3: ADU MAY BE A MAXIMUM OF 150% OF THE HEIGHT OF THE HISTORIC BUILDING ON THE SAME PARCEL OR ANY ADJOINING PARCEL. FOR EXAMPLE: 16' TALL HISTORIC BUILDING X 150% = 24' TALL ADU.

3. ADU Design Standards

These objective design standards apply to the construction of detached 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 shall match the predominant form of the primary dwelling on the parcel or of the historic structures on adjacent parcels.
- Flat roofs are permitted if they are the predominant roof form on the primary structure.

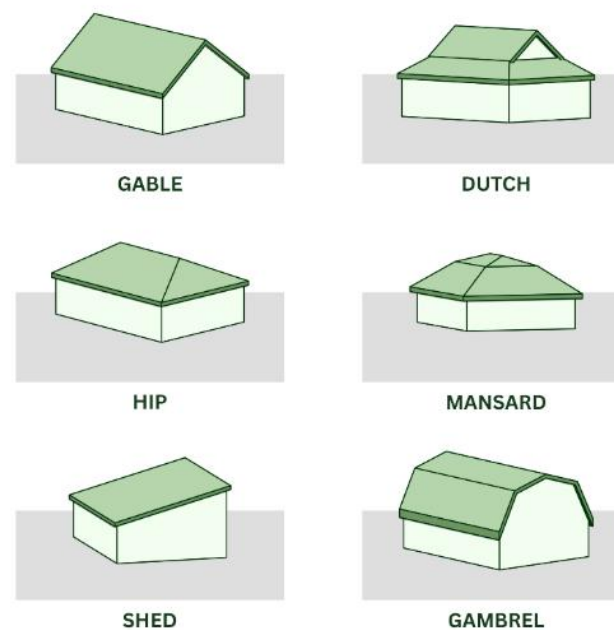


FIGURE 6: COMMON ROOF FORMS FOUND IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

3.2 Walls and Cladding

- Wall cladding shall be traditional siding such as bevel, narrow lap, Dolly Varden, shingle, clap board, Dutch lap, 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 the existing contributing building on the same lot or adjoining lot.
- Vinyl siding and T-1-11 siding types are prohibited.

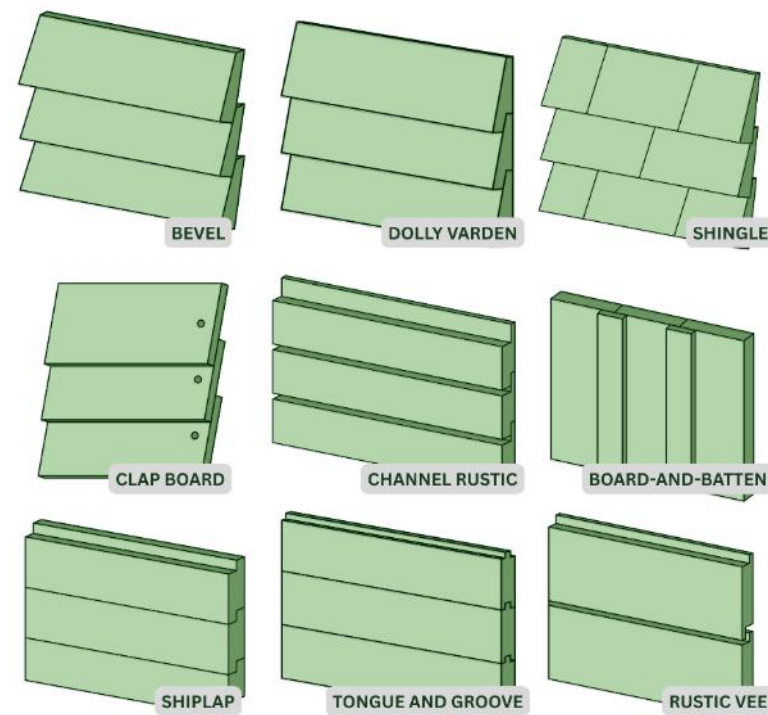


FIGURE 7: EXAMPLES OF TRADITIONAL SIDING PROFILES

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.
- Sliding windows and internal grids are prohibited.
- Windows must include exterior sills and trim on all elevations.

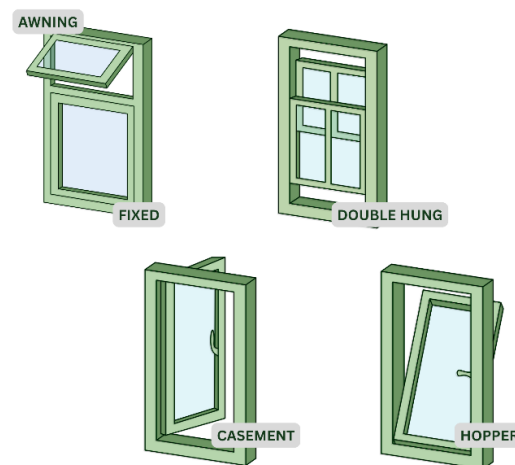


FIGURE 8: ALLOWED WINDOW TYPES INCLUDE AWNING, FIXED, DOUBLE HUNG, SINGLE HUNG, CASEMENT, OR HOPPER. SLIDING WINDOWS ARE NOT ALLOWED.



FIGURE 9: WINDOWS MUST HAVE SILL AND TRIM PROFILE AS SHOWN.

3.5 Doors

- Doors must be paneled.
- Flush panel 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

- For ADUs fronting a street or alley, primary entrances must face the public right of way.
 - Exception: On Alley-fronting ADUs with garage doors, primary pedestrian entrance may be within 5-feet of the garage door that opens to the alley. Doors a secondary façade may not be obscured with solid fencing/gates.



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. 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 within side yards and screened from public view with solid fencing or evergreen landscaping.
- Unless installed on a flat roof and concealed from view by a parapet wall, exterior condensers and heat pumps must be ground mounted and screened.
- Window and roof-mounted HVAC equipment visible from the public right-of-way is prohibited.
- Air handlers shall be installed within the building envelope.
- 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.
- Electrical risers shall be installed within the building envelope.
- Ogee-style or round gutters are required for ADUs located within the Central City.

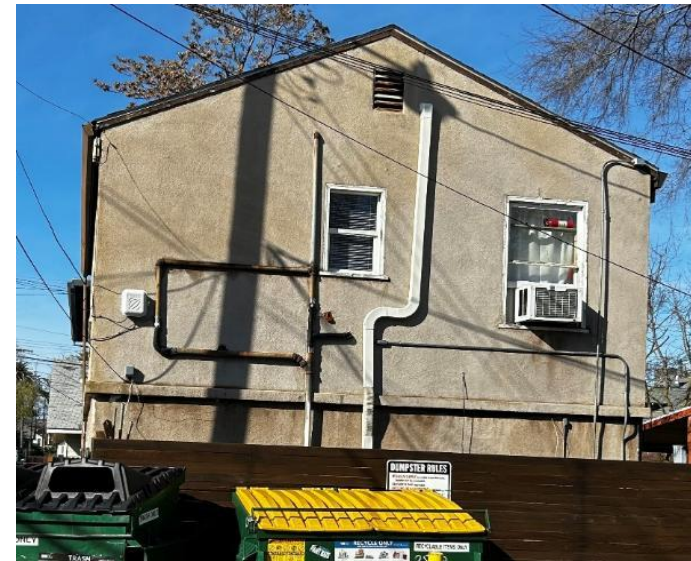


FIGURE 12: WINDOW MOUNTED AIR CONDITIONERS MUST NOT BE VISIBLE FROM THE PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY. EXPOSED PIPING OR CONDUIT IS PROHIBITED.

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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.
- Entrance light fixtures adjacent to the street or alley shall operate dusk to dawn via photovoltaic sensor or timer.
- 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.
- New parking areas shall be within an enclosed garage.



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

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:
 - ADUs must be set back no more than 5 feet from the alley property line.
 - ADUs on alleys must include at least two operable windows facing the alley.
 - ADUs with alley access must 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.
 - ADUs on alleys with garage doors, must be raised panel with glazed upper sections.



FIGURE 14: EXAMPLE CONCEPT OF AN ALLEY-FRONTING ADU.

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