

# Memo

**To:** Town of Century Town Council  
**From:** Eric Christianson, Planner, Emerald Coast Regional Council  
**Cc:** Dave Murzin, Town Manager  
**Date:** May 19, 2026  
**Re:** Accessory Dwelling Unit Policy Options

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## **Purpose**

The Town Council has directed staff to explore an ordinance revising the Town's existing Accessory Apartment Ordinance. Before ordinance language can be drafted, the Council must provide directions on each of the following twelve policy questions. Any recommendations reflect professional planning practice. Questions about legal compliance, including the comprehensive plan consistency issue discussed in question 2, should be directed to the Town Attorney.

## **Implications of Expanding Accessory Dwelling Unit Permissions**

Before addressing the specific policy questions below, the Council should consider the implications of expanding Accessory Dwelling Unit permissions in the Town of Century. What ultimately happens will depend on how permissive or restrictive the final ordinance is. The following is intended to help the Council make an informed decision.

## **Potential Benefits**

The most immediate benefit of an expanded ADU ordinance is the ability for families to house relatives on the same property as an existing home. ADUs are typically smaller and less expensive to rent than standalone homes, providing additional housing options at lower cost. Allowing property owners to add a legal ADU may increase the value of residential properties by expanding their potential use. For owners on fixed or limited incomes, a permitted ADU could provide meaningful additional income.

## **Potential Concerns**

The most significant concern is legal. Many residential parcels in Century are already developed at or near the maximum density permitted under the Comprehensive Plan. In the Low-Density Residential category, where many lots are already developed at or near the 4 dwellings per acre maximum, a significant number of property owners could immediately add a second unit, in many cases a manufactured home. Additional dwelling units also mean additional demand on already stressed water, sewer, solid waste, and road infrastructure. A permissive ADU ordinance over time could change the character of residential neighborhoods in ways that are difficult to reverse.

## **Balancing These Considerations**

The Council is not faced with a choice between allowing and prohibiting ADUs. The specific standards the Council decides to adopt include size, attachment, setbacks, utility connections, and minimum lot size. A more restrictive ordinance will produce fewer units and will be more targeted. A more permissive ordinance will produce more units but will also carry more risks like those described above.

These are policy judgments that belong to the Council. Staff is available to help the Council think through the tradeoffs and to draft the ordinance.

## **Policy Questions**

The following twelve questions must be answered by Council before staff can develop a draft ordinance. Where staff has a recommendation, it is noted.

### **1. Name and Definition**

The existing ordinance uses the term "accessory apartment." Staff recommends renaming this to "Accessory Dwelling Unit" (ADU) to reduce confusion.

Staff also recommends adding a clear definition distinguishing an ADU from a prohibited second dwelling unit. This definition should also require that an ADU may only be permitted where there is a lawfully established legal dwelling already in place.

*Council direction needed: Should the name be changed to Accessory Dwelling Units? Does the Council agree with the definition approach and the requirement that an existing legal dwelling be already present on the lot?*

### **2. Comprehensive Plan Consistency**

The Low Density Residential category explicitly authorizes accessory residential uses subject to Land Development Code (LDC) standards. This can be reasonably extended to the Medium Density category as well. An ADU ordinance limited to these categories is clearly consistent with the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

The Rural Residential and Mixed Use categories do not contain the same explicit language. Rural Residential describes permitted development only as single-family detached homes on individual lots. Mixed Use is worth particular attention because it makes up a significant portion of the Town's land area

including much of the Century Blvd Corridor, and many Mixed Use parcels are developed as single family homes. Residents in those areas would not be eligible for an ADU under an ordinance limited to Low and Medium Density Residential categories. Extending the ordinance to Rural Residential or Mixed Use parcels is more legally uncertain and may require a concurrent comp plan amendment.

*Council direction needed: Should the ordinance apply to all residential land use categories or be limited to Low and Medium Density Residential categories where the comp plan authorization is clearest? ECRC recommends the Town Attorney weigh in before drafting proceeds.*

### **3. Attached or Detached**

The current ordinance does not explicitly address whether an ADU must be attached to the principal structure or may be a separate detached structure.

**Option A** — Attached only: The ADU must be contained within or structurally attached to the principal structure.

**Option B** — Detached permitted: A detached ADU may be permitted subject to standards including a minimum separation distance between the ADU and the principal structure. What should the minimum separation distance be?

*Council direction needed: Should ADUs be limited to attached units only or should detached units also be permitted? If detached are permitted what should the minimum separation distance be?*

### **4. Maximum Number Per Lot**

The current ordinance permits one ADU per lot in addition to the primary dwelling. Staff recommends retaining this standard.

*Council direction needed: Confirm one ADU per lot maximum.*

### **5. Maximum Size**

The current ordinance limits ADUs to 25% of the gross floor area of the principal structure. Staff recommends the Council consider a range of options. The average single-family home in Century is approximately 1,500 square feet and the median is approximately 1,200 square feet. The examples below use the median as a reference point, but every application would be calculated based on the actual size of the existing home.

- 25% — Current standard. Limits units to 300 square feet on a median-sized Century home.
- 50% — Doubles current maximum size. Allows 600 square feet on a median-sized home.
- 75% — Allows approximately 900 square feet on a median-sized home.
- 100% — Allows a unit equal in size to the principal dwelling.
- Alternatively, there could be a fixed allowed square footage, regardless of principal structure size.

The ADU shall not exceed the height or square footage of the principal structure. Staff recommends this as a minimum standard regardless of which size option is chosen.

*Council direction needed: What maximum size standard should apply?*

## **6. Minimum Lot Size**

Without a minimum lot size requirement, an ADU could be added to any residential lot regardless of size, including smaller lots in established neighborhoods already at or near maximum density. The answer will also affect legal nonconforming ("grandfathered") lots, properties that were platted before current zoning standards and are smaller than the minimum lot size now required in their district. There is a significant number of such lots in Century.

Many nonconforming lots are small enough that adding a second structure would produce density far exceeding what the Comprehensive Plan permits.

Options for Council consideration:

**No minimum** — Available on any residential lot, conforming or nonconforming.

**Conforming lots only** — ADUs permitted only on lots that meet the minimum lot size for their zoning district. Legal nonconforming ("grandfathered") lots would not qualify. This would exclude many smaller lots.

**Fixed minimum** — A single Town-wide minimum, for example 0.25, 0.5, or 1 acre, would exclude the smallest residential lots regardless of land use district.

*Council direction needed: Should a minimum lot size apply, and if so what standard do you want to adopt: no minimum, conforming lots only, or a fixed minimum acreage?*

## **7. Utility Connections**

Shared utility connections are one mechanism for distinguishing a permitted ADU from simply developing two units on a single-family parcel. Without shared utilities, an ADU with independent connections is indistinguishable from a second dwelling unit and may be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Shared utilities also provide an enforceable distinction that staff can verify at the time of permit without ongoing monitoring.

Requiring shared utilities is a significant restriction. It limits the ADU's usefulness as an independent rental unit and may add cost or complexity to detached structures where running shared connections requires additional site work.

*Council direction needed: Should shared utility connections be required?*

## **8. Setbacks**

The Town's standard residential setbacks are 5 feet from side and rear property lines and from 34 to 81 feet from the centerline of the road depending on the category of road. These standards result in structures very close to property lines.

The council may consider increased setbacks for ADUs, particularly detached units, and a requirement that ADUs be located to the rear of the principal structure. This would minimize impacts on neighbors and place limits on which lots could accommodate an ADU.

Suggested options:

**Option A** — Standard 5-foot setbacks for attached ADUs; 10-foot side and rear setbacks for detached ADUs.

**Option B** — 10-foot side and rear setbacks for all ADUs regardless of attachment

**Option C** — 15-foot rear and 10-foot side setbacks for detached ADUs

*Council direction needed: What setback standard should apply? Should a rear-yard location requirement be included?*

## **9. Off-Street Parking**

Requiring off-street parking for ADUs is standard practice in many Florida ordinances. The parking space may be accommodated within an existing driveway if it is large enough to serve both the ADU and the primary dwelling without blocking street access.

*Council direction needed: Should one off-street parking space be required for the ADU?*

## **10. Design Standards**

Staff recommends replacing the standard that the ADU "shall be located and designed so as not to interfere with the appearance of the principal structure as a one-family dwelling unit" with more objective language.

In practice most ADUs in Century are likely to be manufactured homes. Design standards may be difficult to apply fairly to manufactured homes, which are governed by federal HUD construction standards rather than local building codes. The Council should consider whether design standards are workable given the likely reality of what will be built. Size, location, and setback requirements may accomplish the same goal.

*Council direction needed: Should design standards be included, and if so which ones?*

## **11. No Variance Provision**

The current ordinance prohibits variances or waivers from its requirements. Staff recommends retaining this provision. It is particularly important for a town without a Board of Adjustment and protects the Town from requests to waive standards on a case-by-case basis.

*Council direction needed: Confirm retention of no variance provision.*

## **12. Purpose Statement**

The current ordinance's purpose statement references "older households" and "elderly persons." Staff recommends revising this language as it creates potential Fair Housing Act risks by suggesting the

ordinance is intended to benefit a specific demographic. A neutral purpose statement referencing housing availability and multigenerational living arrangements generally is recommended.

*Council direction needed: Confirm revised purpose language.*

### **A Note on Process**

Any LDC amendment requires drafting, legal review, public notice, and two public hearings under state law. A concurrent comprehensive plan amendment as discussed in question two would add additional time and cost. The Town's pending CPTA grant application through FloridaCommerce would fund this work at no cost to the Town if awarded, though the Council has determined that the associated timeline does not meet its current needs.

The Emerald Coast Regional Council is available to assist the Town with any of these questions and to support the drafting process once Council direction is received on all these questions. If any further information would help the Council make these decisions please let us know.