

Memo

To: Town of Century Town Council
From: Eric Christianson, Planner, Emerald Coast Regional Council
Cc: Dave Murzin, Town Manager
Date: April 27, 2026
Re: Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance Change Options

Purpose

As requested by the Town Council of the Town of Century, this memo gives an overview of some policy options available to the Town if the Council wishes to modify the Town's Land Development Code (LDC) to expand the ability of property owners to build Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Accessory Dwelling Units (also known as granny flats or accessory apartments) are secondary dwellings established on a parcel that already has a home on it.

Current Situation

The Town's Land Development Code and Comprehensive Plan permit only one dwelling unit per residential lot in most zoning districts. The only ADUs currently allowed are accessory apartments limited to 25% of the size (gross floor area) of the principal structure. The current ordinance does not allow any variances or modification to this minimum (Section 90-81). There is no current provision for any other form of second dwelling on a single residential parcel.

The current LDC is intentionally simple. Most approvals are based on clear standards. Either a use meets the requirements, or it does not. This is so staff can make those determinations without requiring public hearings or weighing competing considerations. Unlike communities with a full zoning ordinance, the Town does not currently have an active Board of Adjustment set up to evaluate requests that fall outside clear standards and require judgment calls on a case-by-case basis.

The following are three options that the Town Council could consider to modify the Town's Ordinances.

Option 1: Address ADUs Through a Comprehensive LDC Update

The Emerald Coast Regional Council is applying for a Community Planning Technical Assistance (CPTA) grant on behalf of the Town of Century through FloridaCommerce to fund a comprehensive Land Development Code rewrite. If funding is received, work would be completed during the 2026–2027 fiscal year. ECRC applied and was not awarded this funding last year, but the Town's recently received Rural designation significantly improves its chances for approval this cycle.

Any change to the Land Development Code (LDC) requires drafting new ordinance language, legal review, public notice, and two public hearings under state law. These costs are not insignificant. Addressing accessory dwelling units including ADUs for medical hardship housing as part of a state funded LDC rewrite would allow the Town to develop a considered ordinance that addresses this and other issues in the LDC without additional cost to the Town.

The tradeoff is timing. If the grant is awarded, work would begin this year, but the process of drafting, public hearings, and adoption would likely extend into 2027. The Council should weigh whether that timeline is acceptable. A full LDC update would also involve community input and professional planning analysis, giving the entire community a voice in what kind of housing future Century wants.

Option 2: Expand the Existing Accessory Apartment Ordinance

The Town already allows ADUs which it calls accessory apartments. The Town Council could pass an ordinance to modify this existing ordinance to allow more structures to qualify as accessory dwellings. This change would maintain clear objective standards available to all residents that staff could administer. For example, the Council could increase the maximum size of an accessory apartment from the current 25% of the gross floor area of the principal structure to 50%. Standards for setbacks (minimum distances from property lines), utility connections, and design could be added.

This approach has several advantages. It fits within the Town's existing code structure. It does not require creating a new approval process. It would be available to all property owners in Town who meet the standards, not just those in specific hardship situations.

The Council should understand that expanding this provision would be a meaningful change to the character of Century. A larger accessory apartment allowance would affect every residential property in Town and could result in a significant number of new units over time. The Council should think carefully about what standards would apply including: lot size minimums, setback requirements, utility connections, maximum size, and whether the unit must be attached or could be detached.

Pursuing this as a standalone ordinance now would likely take up to three months and incur costs for the Town including staff time drafting the ordinance, legal review, and public hearing costs. Those same costs would be covered by the CPTA grant if the Town receives the grant. However, this option is quickest and most straightforward to implement.

Option 3: Adopt a Temporary Medical Hardship Special Exception

Some jurisdictions, including Escambia County, have adopted specific provisions allowing temporary placement of Accessory Dwelling Units on a residential lot when a documented medical hardship requires in-home care. This is a more targeted approach than Option 2, focused on a specific need rather than a general expansion of housing options. The Council should understand what adopting something similar to Escambia County's ordinance would require.

Unlike the clear measurable requirements that govern most of the Town's code, a “Special Exception” or “Conditional Use” like Escambia County’s medical hardship provision requires case-by-case judgment. Escambia County administers this through a Board of Adjustment. That is a body that holds public hearings, weighs evidence, and makes decisions on individual requests. The Town does not currently have this structure. Creating one, or formally designating the Council to serve in that role, would require a separate ordinance and defined procedures before any applications could be considered.

A Medical Hardship Provision for temporary ADUs does not guarantee approval to anyone who requests it. The applicant must pay an application fee, and demonstrate compliance with all conditions outlined in the ordinance, including in the case of Escambia County’s ordinance:

1. A letter from a Florida licensed physician certifying medical need,
2. Demonstration that the medical hardship cannot be addressed through any other means,
3. Proof that adequate utilities are available,
4. Evidence that the use will not negatively affect neighboring properties.

Property owners within 500 ft. of the parcel will receive a letter informing them of the application and they must be given the right to participate and object. The hearing body must schedule a public hearing to weigh all of these and may approve, deny, or attach conditions.

A temporary use approval requires that a structure be removed when the medical hardship ends. The Town's current enforcement capacity is limited. This is a practical consideration the Council should weigh honestly before creating a new category of temporary use that depends on timely enforcement of removal conditions.

This would be a major change to the Town’s ordinances. It would likely take at least six to nine months, cost significantly more to develop and implement, and require a thorough review by the Town’s attorney. These costs could be substantially reduced if this option is considered as part of a state funded LDC update.

Summary

Each option involves tradeoffs the Council should consider.

Option 1 — addressing these questions through the state funded LDC update would be the most cost-effective path and would allow for broader community input, but funding is not guaranteed and it will take longer. If funding is secured the project would be completed in early to mid-2027.

Option 2 — expanding the existing accessory apartment ordinance builds on a framework the Town already has and does not require a new hearing process. It would expand housing options available to all property owners in Town. The Town's most recent LDC amendment took approximately three to four months from initiation to adoption.

Option 3 — a medical hardship special exception would be judged on a case-by-case basis but is much more complex. It requires building a hearing and enforcement process the Town does not currently have. This is a complex change to the Town’s code and operations that would likely take at least six to nine months.

The Emerald Coast Regional Council is available to assist the Town in drafting any ordinance the Council chooses to pursue, and to support the state funded LDC update process if the grant is awarded.