

# Accessory Dwelling Units

Columbus City Council

January 13, 2026



# Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)

- Having a second small dwelling on the same lot or attached to a single-family home
  - An apartment over the garage
  - A backyard cottage
  - A basement apartment
  - A pool house

## The Purpose of ADU's

Provide affordable housing or housing to a family member

# ADU's Defined

- Referred to as accessory apartments, second units, or granny flats
- Are additional living quarters on single-family lots that are independent of the primary dwelling unit.
- The separate living spaces are equipped with kitchen and bathroom facilities and can be either attached or detached from the main residence.





# Brief History of ADUs

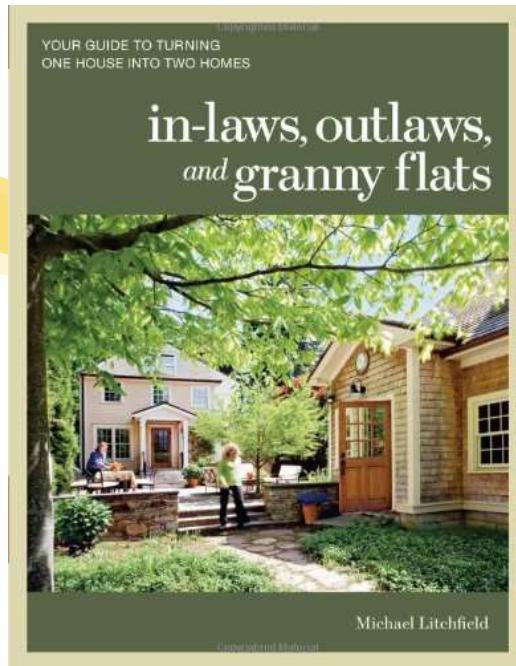
- Can be traced back to the early twentieth century.
- After World War II, an increased demand for housing led to a booming suburban population.
- Large lots and an emphasis on the nuclear family, with suburban development lessen the need for ADU's.



# Benefits of ADUs

- Accessory dwelling units offer a variety of benefits to communities and citizens:
  - They help increase a community's housing supply
    - They cost less than a new single-family home on a separate lot
    - They are an affordable housing option for many low- and moderate-income residents.
  - Elderly and/or disabled persons who may want to live close to family members or caregivers. This allows senior citizens to “age in place”.
  - Empty nesters that move in with their children’s family to create multigenerational households.
  - Students or young adults just entering the workforce find ADUs convenient and affordable.

# Other Advantages of ADUs



- They can be designed to blend in with the surrounding architecture,
- There is no need to develop new infrastructure
- Allowing ADUs facilitates efficient use of existing housing stock, which helps meet the demand for housing
- Offers an alternative to major zoning changes that can significantly alter neighborhoods.

- However, despite the 2008 recession and its impact on housing, the chief concern then was our aging population. Even when the economy rebounded, multigenerational households are not going anywhere.
- The baby boomers are entering their golden years. An estimated 10,000 boomers are hitting retirement age every day, and the number of Americans at least 65 years old is forecasted to balloon from 61.2 million in 2024 to 72 million in 2030.

# Columbus

ADUs currently exist in Columbus. Prior to World War II, many of the neighborhoods had ADUs, such as garage apartments in the Park District or converted servant quarters in the Historic District.

- Most of these in the aforementioned areas are legal, nonconforming uses. Currently, ADUs are allowed as guest cottages.
- To have a legal guest cottage, a property owner must have a minimum of 1 acre, which excludes a majority of the urban core of Columbus. And the guest cottage is for a guest of the homeowner, not for a tenant.
- Over the last two decades, the Planning Department has received increased requests for ADUs, with multigenerational households being the primary reason for the requests.
- Unfortunately, the 1 acre minimum has hindered the ability to create ADUs on most “in-town” properties.

Despite the 1 acre minimum lot size and the guest requirement, the current ordinance is in line with the ADU requirements of other communities. However, there are some modifications that the Planning Department would like to see added:

- The property owner must live on the property.
- Limit the number of tenants to 2 persons.
- Only one ADU per lot shall be permitted.
- Despite the type of ADU, each shall have its own separate entrance.
- Parking shall be provided on the property in an approved location.
- Detached ADUs shall meet the requirements of Section 2.1.6. Accessory Structures.

Another modification that Council may want to review is architectural standards. These standards could be formatted to require the ADU to closely resemble the primary structure in design and materials.

Applicable Standard	Guest Cottage	Employee Residence	Groom's Quarter	Security Quarters
Minimum Lot Size of Principal Structure	1 acre	2.5 acres	None	None
Maximum Number of Units	1 per lot—not permitted if accessory dwelling unit exists	1 per lot	1 per 5 stalls	1 per project or development
Maximum Floor Area	1,000 square feet, including enclosed garage, porch or similar spaces	1,000 square feet, including enclosed garage, porch or similar spaces	See specific standards	1,000 square feet, including enclosed garage, porch or similar spaces
Rental of Unit Permitted	No	No	No	No
Residency Limitation	Guest of resident	Employee of resident	Employee of resident	Security personnel
Kitchen Permitted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Permitted Residential Zoning Districts	See Below			
Permitted Nonresidential Zoning Districts	None	None	None	UPT, CRD, RO, CO, GC, SAC, LMI, HMI and TECH. May be permitted in PCD or PID

Guest Cottage: RE10, RE5, RE1, RT, SFR1, SFR2

Employee Residence: HIST, RE10, RE5, RE1

Groom's Quarters: HIST

Security Quarters: All commercial & industrial except NC

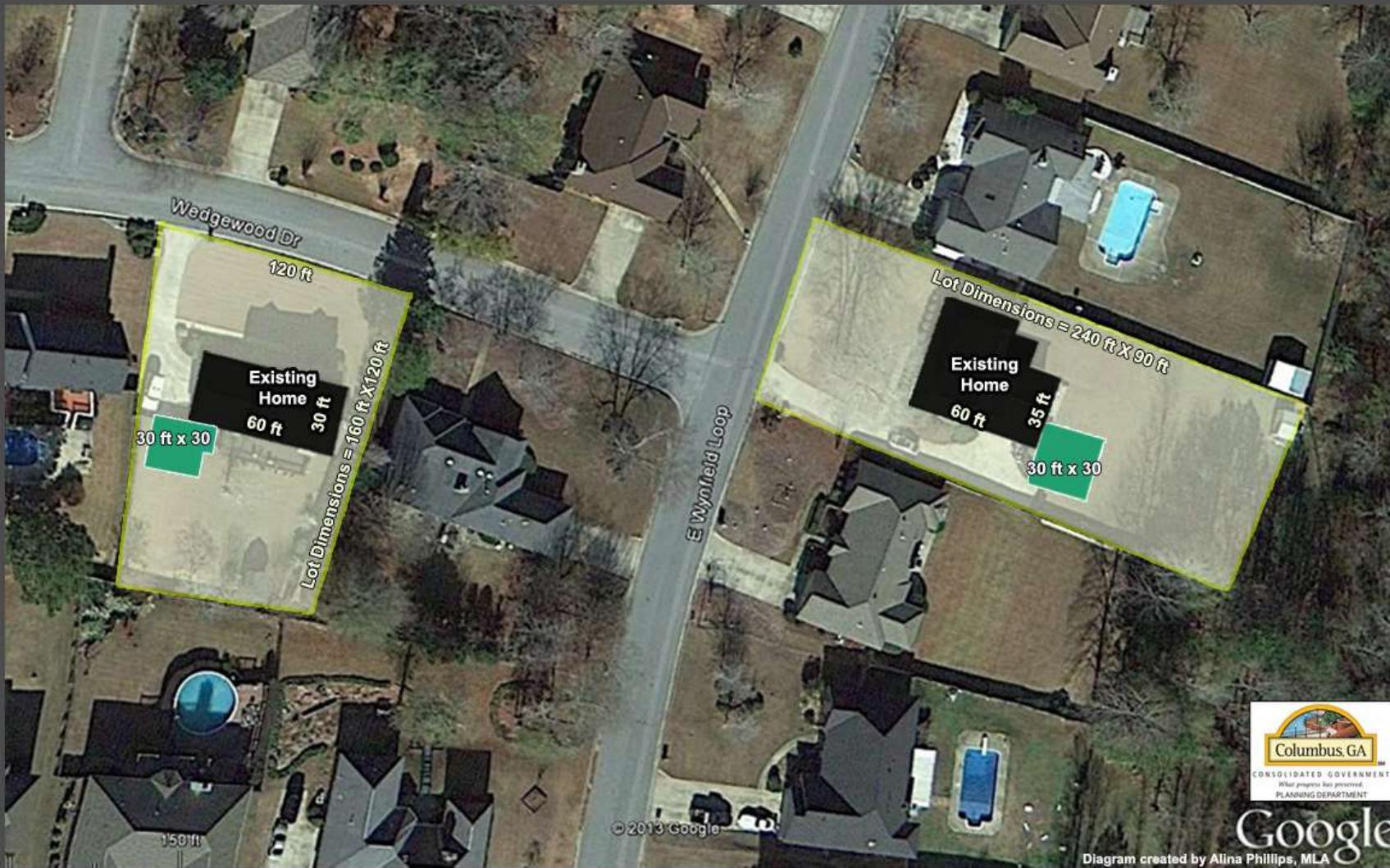
# Other Communities – 2014

- ADU's are prevalent in major metropolitan areas of the West and Northeast. Several Southern cities permit ADUs, from Kissimmee, FL to Arlington, VA.
- Close to home, ADUs are permitted in Fairhope, AL and North Augusta, SC, as well as a couple in Georgia, such as Forsyth County and Roswell. The biggest difference between our current ordinance and these other cities is the lot size requirement. For instance, Kissimmee, Arlington, Roswell, North Augusta, and Fairhope all utilize the underlying zoning requirements to determine lot size, at which point the ADU is considered an accessory structure (if it's detached).

# Other Communities – 2025

- ADU's are prevalent in major metropolitan areas of the United States, from Seattle, WA to Miami, FL.
- Close to home, ADUs are permitted in Forsyth County, Atlanta, Savannah, Decatur, Marietta, Alpharetta, Cobb County, the mountains (Fannin & Haralson Counties), Roswell, Dunwoody, and Lilburn. The biggest difference between our current ordinance and these other cities is the lot size requirement. For instance, Atlanta, Decatur, Savannah, Dunwoody, and Lilburn all utilize the underlying zoning requirements to determine lot size, at which point the ADU is considered an accessory structure (if it's detached). Marietta and Alpharetta require the property owner to live on site.

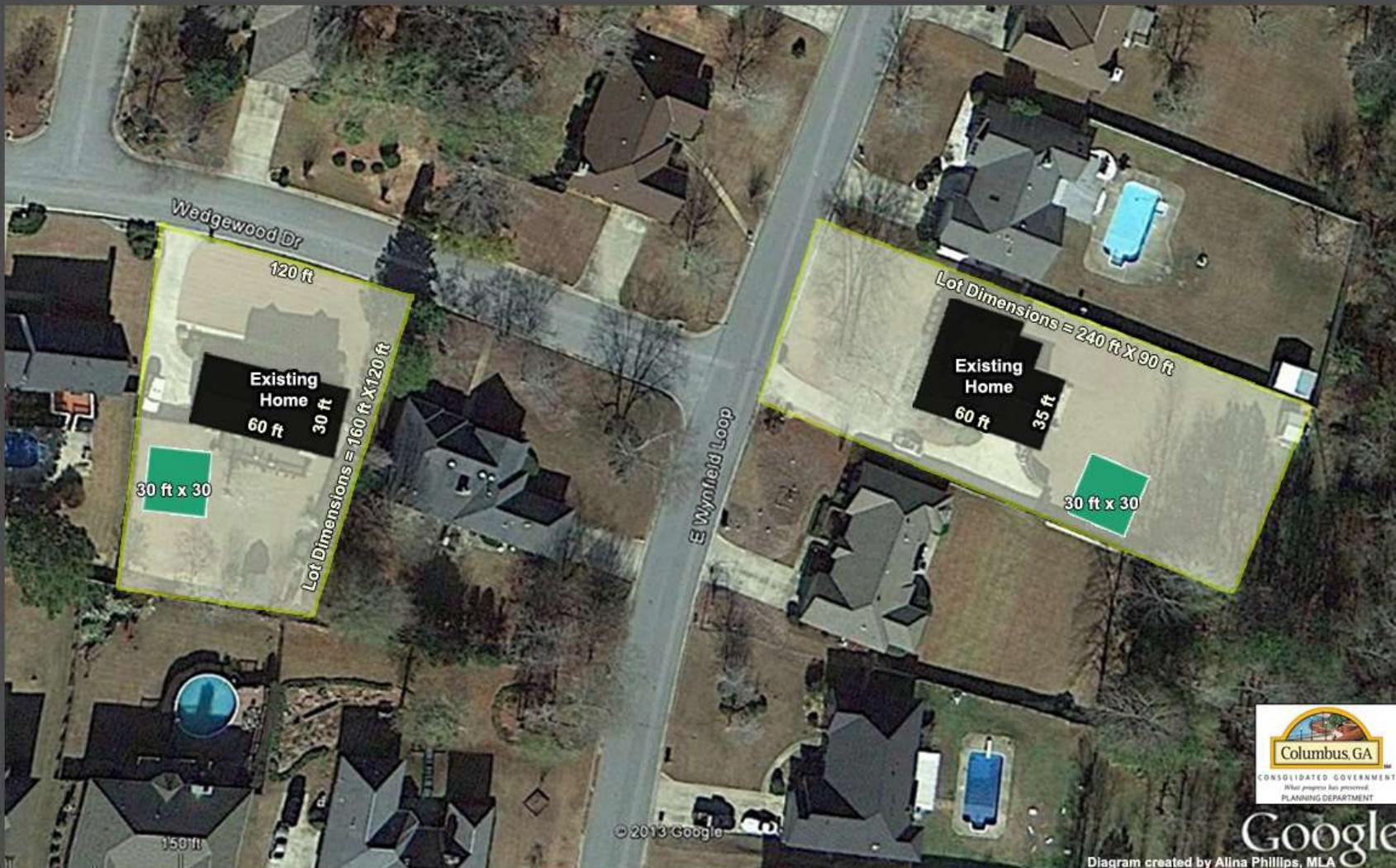
## Concept for Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)



Google

Diagram created by Alina Phillips, MLA

## Concept for Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)



Google

Diagram created by Alina Phillips, MLA



FRONT VIEW



SIDE VIEW

Photograph: Alina Phillips

Accessory Dwelling Unit  
19th Avenue  
Columbus, GA



**GARAGE APARTMENT**  
Historic District

**SEPARATE DWELLING**  
Historic District





**GARAGE APARTMENT**  
Park District



# Tiny House Update



# Overview

- What are tiny houses?
- Department of Community Affairs – Appendix BB

# Tiny Is the New Big



Average new home:  
**2,598 sq. ft.**



Tiny house:  
**100-400 sq. ft.**

## How tiny is a 400-square-foot house?



**17,424**  
tiny houses could fit  
inside **Disneyland**  
in California



**2,020**  
tiny houses could  
fit on the **Golden  
Gate Bridge**



**144**  
tiny houses could fit  
on a **football field**



**9**  
**king-size beds** could  
fit in a tiny house  
(and nothing else!)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, The Tiny Life

# Tiny House

- Typically defined as a single-family home, generally 400 square feet or less, excluding lofts.
- Built in various ways, it is important to identify which types of tiny homes fall within the scope and application of building codes



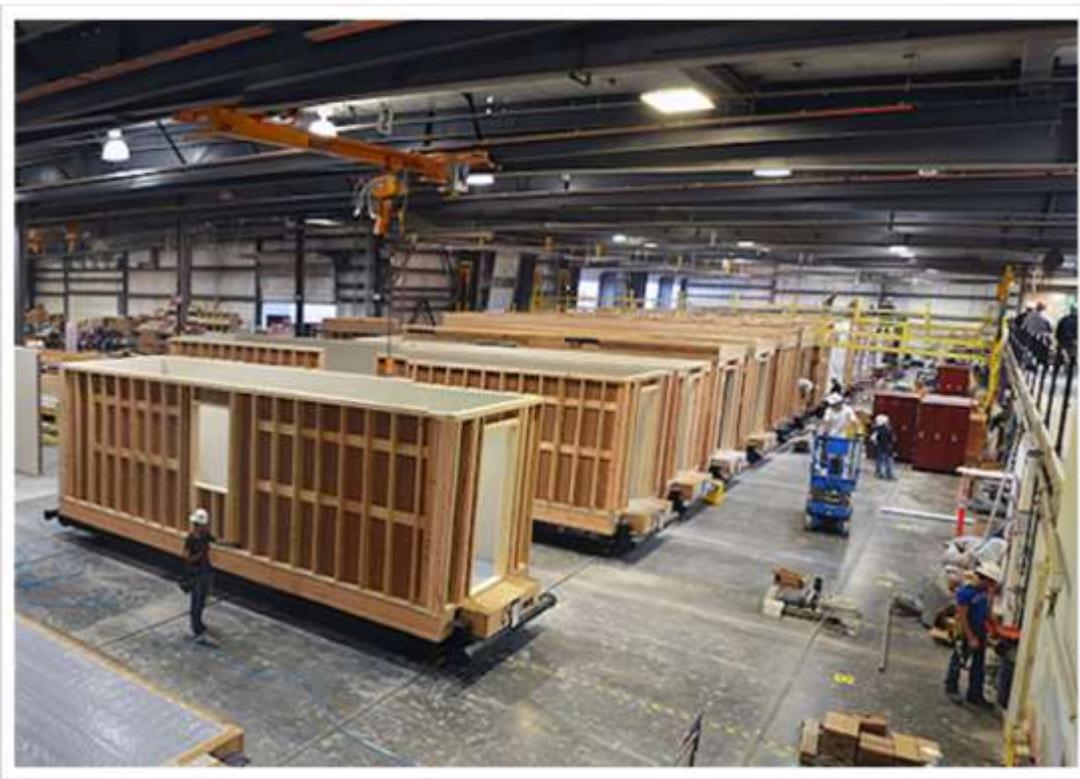
# Recreational Vehicles (RVs)



# Manufactured (mobile) Homes



# Residential (Modular) Industrialized Buildings



# Modular Building Tiny House

- Every industrialized building (IB) is inspected by independent third-party agencies. Upon completion, a DCA insignia is affixed to each module or unit.
- Once approved by DCA, a moving permit would need to be pulled and then a building permit for foundations only for Inspections & Code to verify.



# Site-Built Dwellings



# Site Built Tiny House

Property would go through typical residential site development and building permit process:

- Plan Review
- Permit Pulled
- Inspections Performed
- Certificate of Completion



# Tiny Houses & Code



# Tiny House: Introduced in 2012 International Residential Code - Appendix S

- DCA adopted changes to the initial Code:
  - Reduces minimum habitable room area from 120 to 70 SF excepting kitchens.
  - Loft height minimum is 5 feet
  - Smoke and CO detectors are required
- IRC was updated again in 2018

\*CCG requires ALL modular homes to be affixed to a permanent foundation

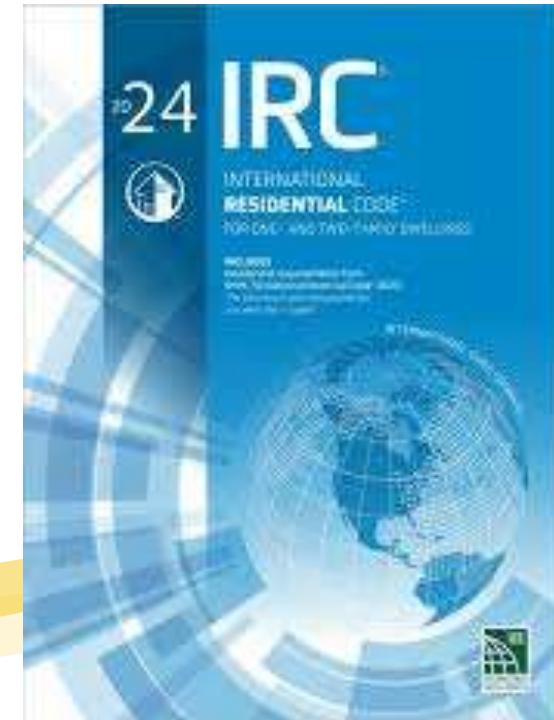


# Tiny House – 2024 IRC Appendix BB

## LATEST IRC UPDATE

- January 1, 2026
- 400 SF and less
- Minimum ceiling height 6' 8"
- Lofts min height 3'; 35 SF minimum
- 17" minimum stair width to lofts at handrail and 20" minimum below handrail
- Ladders & Ship ladders allowed with specifications

\*DCA will still require smoke and CO detectors



# Other Communities

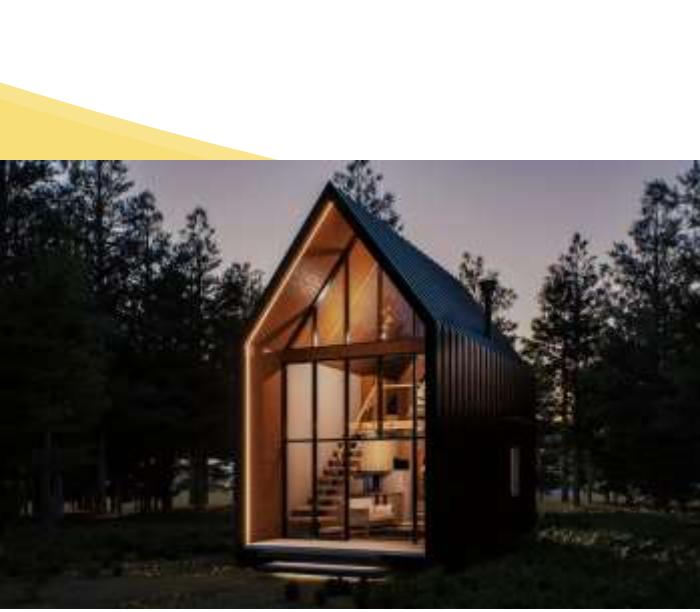
- Tiny homes are prevalent in major metropolitan areas of the United States, from Los Angeles, CA to Portland, ME.
- Close to home, ADUs are permitted in DeKalb, Cherokee, Clayton, and Bartow Counties in metro Atlanta; Burke County (east); and Chatham and Atkinson Counties in SE GA.

# Conclusion

- With Council direction, the Tiny House – 2024 IRC Appendix BB can be added to Local Building Code and determine which zones they will be allowed in.
- This would allow tiny houses to be built on lots as the primary structure or on multifamily lots if in an approved zone.
- Tiny Homes as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) would be allowed as such but would require approval of PAC before proceeding to Council.

# Conclusion

- Tiny House regulations would only apply to Modular and Site Built Houses that meet said requirements.
- Currently the City does not allow structures under 700 SF.



# Other options?

- Pocket neighborhoods
- Scandinavian houses
- Urban townhouses





QUESTIONS?