Columbus GEORGIA

We do amazing.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS & TINY HOUSES

PLANNING DEPARTMENT | COLUMBUS CITY COUNCIL | NOVEMBER 10, 2026

DRAFT - staff verification required; not a determination (R17)

AGENDA

Columbus already has accessory dwelling units: garage apartments and backyard cottages, many built before World War II. Today the UDO allows new ones only as guest cottages on lots of at least one acre. This presentation reviews ADUs and tiny houses, how other Georgia communities handle them, and the changes the Planning Department would like to see.

01 **What Is an ADU?**
Definition, history, and why communities allow them

02 **ADUs in Columbus**
What the UDO allows today, local examples, peer communities and proposed changes

03 **Tiny Houses**
Which tiny homes the building code covers, and how they are permitted

04 **Options & Direction**
Other small-home types, and the direction we are asking for

01

WHAT IS AN ADU?

DEFINITION, HISTORY, AND WHY COMMUNITIES ALLOW THEM

ADUs DEFINED

A SECOND, SMALL HOME ON THE SAME LOT AS A SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE

Park District, Columbus



Columbus Planning Department

WHAT MAKES IT AN ADU

Also called accessory apartments, second units or granny flats: additional living quarters on a single-family lot that are independent of the primary dwelling unit.

- Equipped with its own kitchen and bathroom facilities
- Can be attached to the main residence or detached from it
- Common forms: an apartment over the garage, a backyard cottage, a basement apartment or a pool house

→Purpose: affordable housing, or housing for a family member

A BRIEF HISTORY

ADUs ARE NOT NEW; POSTWAR SUBURBS MADE THEM RARE



Television's best-known ADU: the Fonz rented the apartment over the Cunninghams' garage on Happy Days.

1900s

→ADUs can be traced back to the early twentieth century

→In Columbus: garage apartments in the Park District and converted servant quarters in the Historic District

1945

→After World War II, demand for housing led to a booming suburban population

→Large lots, an emphasis on the nuclear family and suburban development lessened the need for ADUs

2008

→Despite the recession's impact on housing, the chief concern was our aging population

TODAY

→Multigenerational households are not going anywhere

→Requests to Planning for ADUs have increased over the last two decades

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

THE BABY BOOMERS ARE ENTERING THEIR GOLDEN YEARS

10,000

Estimated baby boomers reaching retirement age every day

61.2M

Americans aged 65 and older in 2024

72M

Americans aged 65 and older forecast for 2030

Despite the 2008 recession and its impact on housing, the chief concern was our aging population. Even as the economy rebounded, multigenerational households are not going anywhere, and an ADU lets families live close together on one lot.

BENEFITS OF ADUs

WHO ADUs SERVE IN A COMMUNITY

MORE HOUSING SUPPLY

- ⟶Cost less than a new single-family home on a separate lot
- ⟶An affordable option for many low- and moderate-income residents

AGING IN PLACE

- ⟶Elderly or disabled persons can live close to family members or caregivers
- ⟶Lets senior citizens "age in place"

MULTIGENERATIONAL HOMES

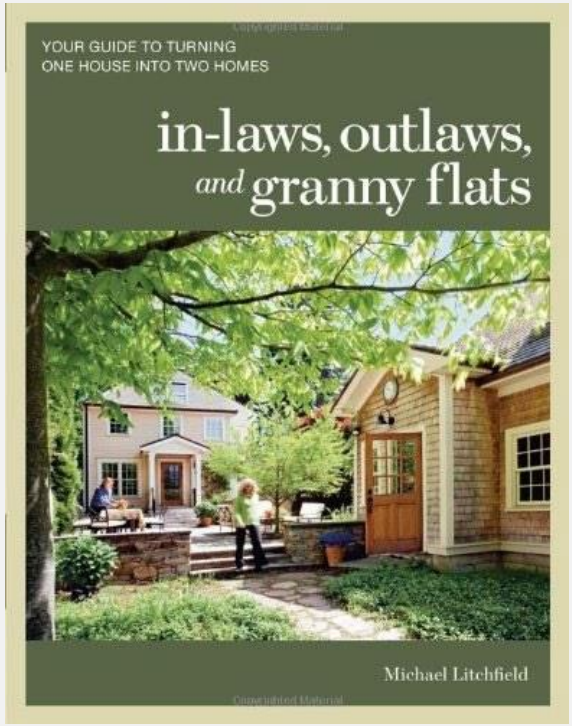
- ⟶Empty nesters can move in with their children's family
- ⟶Creates multigenerational households

YOUNG ADULTS

- ⟶Students and young adults just entering the workforce find ADUs convenient and affordable

OTHER ADVANTAGES

ADDING HOMES WITHOUT CHANGING THE CHARACTER OF A NEIGHBORHOOD



Further reading: Michael Litchfield, In-laws, Outlaws, and Granny Flats

BLENDS IN

Can be designed to blend in with the surrounding architecture

NO NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

There is no need to develop new infrastructure

USES EXISTING HOUSING

Efficient use of existing housing stock helps meet the demand for housing

A GENTLER ALTERNATIVE

An alternative to major zoning changes that can significantly alter neighborhoods

02

ADUs IN COLUMBUS

WHAT THE UDO ALLOWS TODAY, WHAT IS ALREADY HERE, AND WHAT PEERS DO

ADUs IN COLUMBUS TODAY

ALREADY PART OF OUR OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS, BUT HARD TO BUILD NEW

- ADUs already exist here. Before World War II many neighborhoods had them, such as garage apartments in the Park District or converted servant quarters in the Historic District
- Most of these are legal, nonconforming uses
- Today, ADUs are allowed as guest cottages: for a guest of the homeowner, not a tenant, on a lot of at least one acre
- Requests for ADUs have increased over the last two decades, mostly for multigenerational households, but the one-acre minimum has kept them off most "in-town" properties

1 ACRE

Minimum lot for a guest cottage, which excludes a majority of the urban core

1,000 SQ FT

Maximum guest cottage floor area, including enclosed garage, porch or similar spaces

WHAT THE UDO ALLOWS TODAY

FOUR TYPES OF ACCESSORY DWELLING; THE GUEST COTTAGE IS THE ONE A HOMEOWNER CAN USE FOR FAMILY OR GUESTS

STANDARD	GUEST COTTAGE	EMPLOYEE RESIDENCE	GROOM'S QUARTERS	SECURITY QUARTERS
Minimum lot size	1 acre	2.5 acres	None	None
Maximum 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 (500 square feet per unit)	1,000 square feet, including enclosed garage, porch or similar spaces
Rental permitted	No	No	No	No
Who may live there	Guest of resident	Employee of resident	Employee of resident	Security personnel
Zoning districts	RE10, RE5, RE1, RT, SFR1, SFR2	HIST, RE10, RE5, RE1	HIST	Nonresidential: UPT, CRD, RO, CO, GC, SAC, LMI, HMI and TECH; may be permitted in PCD or PID

Source: UDO §3.2.29 and Table 3.2.3, pp.85–86. A kitchen is permitted in all four types. District lists from the Planning Department; confirm against UDO Table 3.1.1.

ADUs ALREADY IN COLUMBUS

GARAGE APARTMENTS AND SEPARATE DWELLINGS IN THE HISTORIC AND PARK DISTRICTS



Historic District



Park District

AN ADU ON 19TH AVENUE

A SMALL HOME AND ITS ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT, SEEN FROM THE FRONT AND THE SIDE





Photographs: Alina Phillips

HOW AN ADU FITS ON A TYPICAL LOT

CONCEPTS FOR AN ATTACHED AND A DETACHED UNIT ON TWO SUBURBAN LOTS





Concept diagrams: Alina Phillips, MLA, Planning Department. Imagery © 2013 Google

Each concept adds a 30 ft x 30 ft unit (900 sq ft). The example lots are 160 ft x 120 ft (about 0.44 acre) and 240 ft x 90 ft (about 0.50 acre): both under the one-acre minimum, so neither could add a guest cottage today.

ADUs ACROSS THE COUNTRY

ATTACHED AND DETACHED UNITS DESIGNED TO FIT THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS










Examples from other communities, as shown in the department's presentation

OTHER COMMUNITIES

WHERE ADUs ARE ALLOWED, THEN AND NOW

2014

MOSTLY THE WEST AND NORTHEAST

Several Southern cities permitted ADUs, from Kissimmee, FL to Arlington, VA. Close to home: Fairhope, AL and North Augusta, SC, and in Georgia, Forsyth County and Roswell.

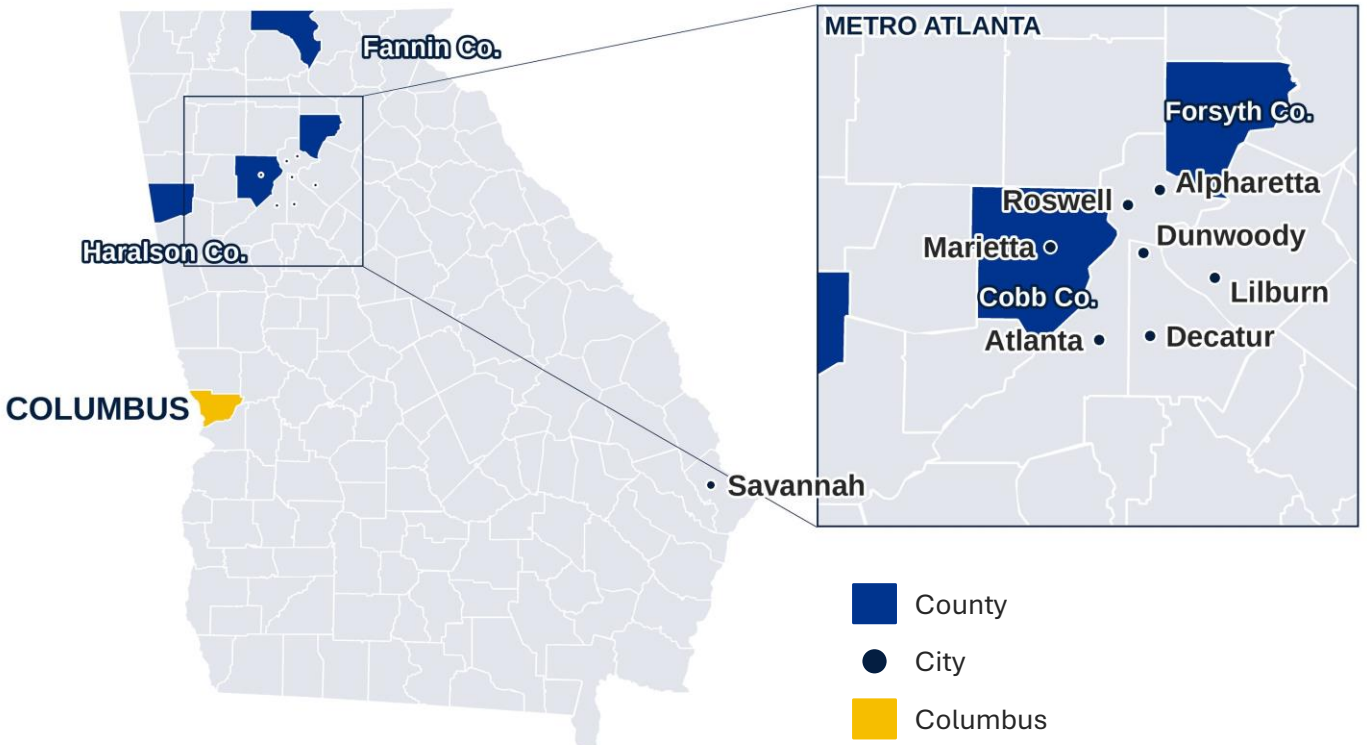
2026

NATIONWIDE, FROM SEATTLE TO MIAMI

In Georgia: Forsyth County, Atlanta, Savannah, Decatur, Marietta, Alpharetta, Cobb County, the mountains (Fannin and Haralson Counties), Roswell, Dunwoody and Lilburn.

ADUs IN GEORGIA

GEORGIA COMMUNITIES THAT PERMIT ADUs, AS NAMED IN THIS PRESENTATION (NOT A COMPLETE LIST)



Map: Census TIGERweb boundaries, 2026-10-25

HOW PEERS SET THE RULES

The biggest difference between our current ordinance and these communities is the lot size requirement.

- Atlanta, Decatur, Savannah, Dunwoody and Lilburn use the underlying zoning to set lot size; a detached ADU is then treated as an accessory structure
- Marietta and Alpharetta require the property owner to live on site

→Columbus today: one-acre minimum lot, and a guest of the homeowner only

PROPOSED ADU STANDARDS

MODIFICATIONS THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT WOULD LIKE TO SEE ADDED

NO SHORT-TERM RENTALS

⟶The ADU shall not be a short-term rental

TWO BEDROOMS AT MOST

⟶Limit the number of bedrooms to 2

ITS OWN ENTRANCE

⟶Regardless of the type of ADU, each shall have its own separate entrance

ACCESSORY STRUCTURE RULES

⟶Detached ADUs shall meet Section 2.1.6, Accessory Structures

FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

⟶Architectural standards: the ADU closely resembles the primary structure in design and materials

Planning's view: apart from the one-acre minimum lot size and the guest requirement, the current ordinance is in line with the ADU requirements of other communities.

03

TINY HOUSES

WHICH TINY HOMES THE BUILDING CODE COVERS, AND HOW THEY ARE PERMITTED

WHAT IS A TINY HOUSE?

TYPICALLY 400 SQUARE FEET OR LESS



DEFINITION

Typically defined as a single-family home, generally 400 square feet or less, excluding lofts.

- Tiny houses are built in various ways
- It is important to identify which types of tiny homes fall within the scope and application of building codes

→Permitted: modular (industrialized) and site-built homes on a permanent foundation

→Not Permitted: recreational vehicles and manufactured (mobile) homes or anything not on a permanent foundation.

TINY IS THE NEW BIG

HOW TINY IS A 400-SQUARE-FOOT HOUSE?

2,598 SQ FT
Average new home

100–400 SQ FT
Tiny 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 (from the infographic in the department's presentation)

WHICH TINY HOMES QUALIFY?

TINY HOUSE RULES WOULD APPLY ONLY TO MODULAR AND SITE-BUILT HOUSES



RECREATIONAL VEHICLES (RVs)

NOT COVERED

Not a dwelling under the tiny house provisions



MANUFACTURED (MOBILE) HOMES

NOT COVERED

Not covered by the tiny house provisions



RESIDENTIAL (MODULAR) INDUSTRIALIZED BUILDINGS

COVERED

Built in a factory; inspected by third-party agencies and approved by DCA



SITE-BUILT DWELLINGS

COVERED

Built on the lot through the normal plan review and permit process

TWO PATHS TO A PERMITTED TINY HOUSE

MODULAR HOMES ARE INSPECTED AT THE FACTORY; SITE-BUILT HOMES FOLLOW THE USUAL PERMIT PROCESS



MODULAR (INDUSTRIALIZED) BUILDING

01	02	03	04
Inspected by independent third-party agencies	DCA insignia affixed to each module or unit on completion	Once approved by DCA, a moving permit is pulled	Building permit for the foundation only, for Inspections & Code to verify



SITE-BUILT TINY HOUSE

01	02	03	04
Plan review	Permit pulled	Inspections performed	Certificate of completion

TINY HOUSES IN THE CODE

HOW THE INTERNATIONAL RESIDENTIAL CODE (IRC) AND GEORGIA DCA TREAT TINY HOUSES



Columbus requires all modular homes to be affixed to a permanent foundation.

2012

→Tiny house provisions introduced in the IRC, Appendix S

→DCA changes: habitable rooms down to 70 sq ft from 120 (excepting kitchens); 5-foot minimum loft height; smoke and CO detectors required

2018

→The IRC was updated again

2026

→January 1, 2026: latest IRC update, the 2024 IRC Appendix BB (Tiny Houses)

→ DCA will still require smoke and CO detectors

→ For appendixes to be enforced, they must be specifically adopted by the local governing authority.

TINY HOUSE STANDARDS

2024 IRC APPENDIX BB, THE LATEST UPDATE (JANUARY 1, 2026)

400 SQ FT

A tiny house is 400 square feet or less

6′ 8″

Minimum ceiling height

3′ | 35 SQ FT

Lofts: 3-foot minimum height and 35 square feet minimum

17″ | 20″

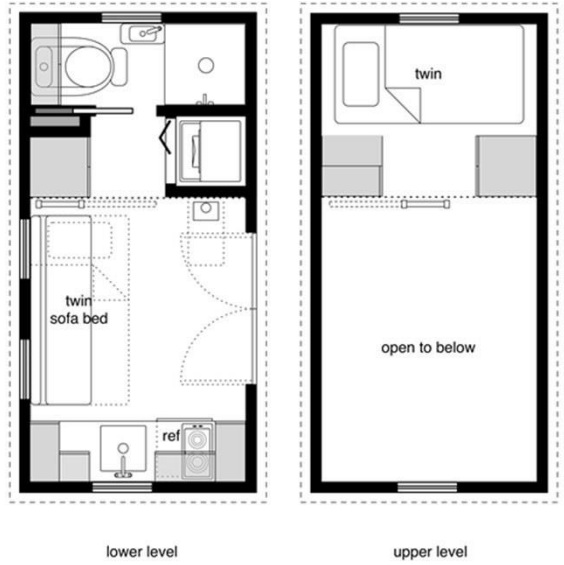
Minimum stair width to lofts: 17 inches at the handrail, 20 inches below it

LADDERS

Ladders and ship ladders allowed, with specifications

SMOKE + CO

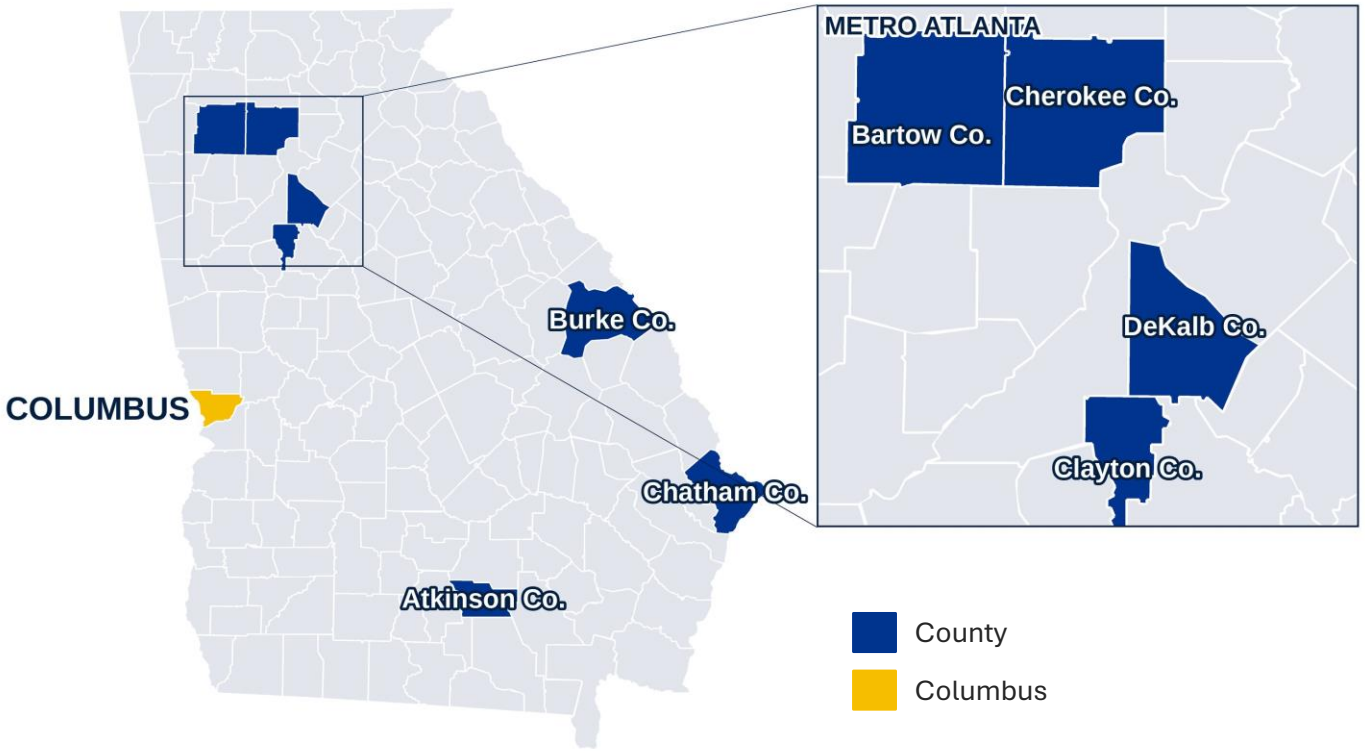
DCA will still require smoke and carbon monoxide detectors



A typical tiny house plan: a lower level with kitchen, bath and sofa bed, and a sleeping loft above.

TINY HOMES IN GEORGIA

GEORGIA COUNTIES THAT ALLOW TINY HOMES (NOT A COMPLETE LIST)



Map: Census TIGERweb boundaries, 2026-10-25

WHERE TINY HOMES ARE ALLOWED

Tiny homes are prevalent in major metropolitan areas of the United States, from Los Angeles, CA to Portland, ME.

- Metro Atlanta: DeKalb, Cherokee, Clayton and Bartow Counties
- East Georgia: Burke County
- Southeast Georgia: Chatham and Atkinson Counties

TINY HOUSE CONCLUSIONS

WHAT COUNCIL APPROVAL WOULD ALLOW

- Approval of proposed ordinance would add the 2024 IRC Appendix BB (Tiny Houses) to the local building code. Tiny houses could then be built on lots as the primary structure, or on multifamily lots in an approved zone
- Tiny homes as ADUs would be allowed as such pending approval of ADU changes in the zoning ordinance.
- Tiny homes must be attached to a permanent foundations and meet the requirements of the Building Code like any other dwelling.

400 SQ FT

Largest tiny house under the 2024 IRC Appendix BB

700 SQ FT

Approximately minimum square footage without adoption of Appendix BB.

COLUMBUS GEORGIA

We do amazing.

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU

www.columbusga.gov/planning

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