



office memorandum

TO: City of Norman Business and Community Affairs Committee

FROM: Jane Hudson, Planning Director
Lora Hoggatt, Planning Services Manager

DATE: March 5, 2026

RE: Possible Amendments to Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Placement Standards;
R-1 ADU Square Footage Allowance;
Subdivision Regulations - Amending Application Deadline and Removal of Greenbelt References

BACKGROUND:

In reviewing recent applications and citizen inquiries, Staff has identified three primary concerns with the existing standards for ADUs:

1. Clarity and Administration

The “rear 25 percent” measurement has proven difficult for applicants and staff to interpret consistently, leading to delays in permitting and frequent requests for clarification.

2. Functional Limitations on Eligible Lots

Strict adherence to the rear placement requirement creates undue hardship on certain lot configurations and may unintentionally prohibit ADUs in districts where they are otherwise permitted.

3. Underutilization of Existing Detached Structures

Within the Core Area, several neighborhoods came forward to downzone from R-2 and R-3 to R-1. In the newly zoned R-1 Districts, detached garages and similar accessory buildings often exceed the maximum 650 square feet of total allowable living area for ADUs. Due to the SF requirement, these structures cannot be converted to an, even in instances when these structures could meet building code standards.

Allowing flexibility for existing detached structures may provide additional housing opportunities without increasing the building footprint or altering established neighborhood character.

Maintaining the subordinate nature of ADUs remains important, however, both the placement requirements and maximum area guidelines may be more restrictive than necessary to meet that goal.

Possible Amendments to Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Placement Standards:

The current adopted Ordinance No. O-2324-40 requires that Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) be located within the rear twenty-five percent (25%) of the principal structure. This requirement is located within the following districts: A-1, Rural Agricultural District, A-2, General Agricultural District, RE, Residential Estate Dwelling District, R-1, Single-Family Dwelling District, and R-1-A, Single-Family Attached Dwelling District. This standard was adopted to ensure that ADUs remain subordinate to the primary dwelling and to preserve established neighborhood character.

Since adoption, Planning Staff have received consistent questions and applications reflecting confusion regarding how the “rear 25 percent of the principal structure” is measured and applied. Applicants frequently inquire whether the measurement is based on the building footprint, total building depth, roofline, or lot configuration. Additional uncertainty arises on corner lots and irregularly shaped parcels.

Furthermore, in the applicable zoning districts, particularly those with smaller or limited rear yard depth, strict application of this requirement effectively prevents placement of an ADU, even when all other zoning standards such as setbacks, height limits, and coverage can be met.

A related issue has emerged in areas that were previously zoned R-2, Two-Family Dwelling District, or R-3, Multifamily Dwelling District, and were subsequently downzoned to R-1. Many of these properties contain existing detached garages or accessory structures that historically could have supported residential uses. However, under current ADU standards, these structures often do not meet the maximum of 650 square feet of total allowable living area, along with the location violating the required setback and cannot be converted into ADUs. As a result, otherwise convertible structures remain vacant and underutilized.

During a period of housing shortage, the inability to repurpose these existing buildings represents a missed opportunity to increase the housing supply without altering neighborhood scale or footprint, as intended with the adoption of the ADU Ordinance.

Existing Language from Ordinance No. O-2324-40:

Placement:

“(b) detached from a principal dwelling unit on the same parcel (notwithstanding other language within this chapter, where an ADU is detached, it must be located no further forward than the rear 25% of the principal structure’s depth).”

Detached Structures:

“(7) One accessory dwelling unit with a total area of no more than six hundred fifty square feet (650 SF) (“ADU”), except that this use shall not be adopted by

reference into the uses allowed in R-2 (“Two-Family Dwelling District”), RM-2 (“Low-Density Apartment District”), and R-3 (“Multifamily Dwelling District”).”

Proposed Language:

Placement Standard Revision:

(b) detached from principal dwelling unit on the same parcel (notwithstanding other language within this chapter, where an ADU is detached, it shall be located no further forward than the principal structure.)

Existing Detached Structures:

“(7) One accessory dwelling unit (“ADU”), except that this use shall not be adopted by reference into the uses allowed in R-2 (“Two-Family Dwelling District”), RM-2 (“Low-Density Apartment District”), and R-3 (“Multifamily Dwelling District”).” (remains unchanged)

- a. ADUs in this district shall not exceed six hundred fifty square feet (650 SF), except that an existing detached accessory structure, legally constructed prior to April 25, 2024 to a size exceeding 650 SF may be converted to an ADU, provided that the structure complies with all other applicable requirements; remains subordinate in scale to the principal dwelling unit; and no expansion of the existing footprint occurs as part of the conversion.

Staff would like direction on whether a size limitation should apply when utilizing an existing building as an ADU.

Subdivision Regulations - Amending Application Deadline and Removal of Greenbelt References

Per Chapter 30, Section 302, the required application deadline for submittal is currently defined as “before 1:30 p.m. Monday, not less than 31 days prior to the next Planning Commission meeting.” This requirement differs from the current submittal deadline established for the CityView application utilized by the Planning Department and the Public Works and Engineering Department. To ensure consistency and eliminate ambiguity associated with the existing Monday 1:30 p.m. deadline, staff proposes revising the required submittal deadline to align with the Planning Department’s standard. Therefore, all required submittals will be due on the first business day of each month. This revision is intended to streamline the review process and establish a clear, consistent monthly schedule.

Staff proposes to remove the reference to the “Greenbelt Enhancement Statement” within the Subdivision Regulations, as this review process is no longer completed. Retaining this reference creates unnecessary confusion and implies an additional level of review that is not applicable under the current regulatory framework. Removing such references will ensure the regulations

accurately reflect existing procedures, clarify the development review process, and prevent misinterpretation regarding required approvals.

CONCLUSION:

These amendments to ADU language would improve clarity, reduce unintended hardship, and allow for increased housing opportunities while maintaining compatibility with established neighborhoods and preserving the subordinate nature of ADUs to principal dwellings.

The amendments to the Subdivision Regulations would help streamline our processes and clear confusion for applicants.