



Accessory Dwelling Units

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the requirements for a garage conversion into an ADU?

Contact Planning Division for zoning requirements.

The existing structure must be upgraded to comply with the current codes.

All approvals/permits must be obtained prior to any work. Approvals/permits will require plans approval.

2. Why do I need to submit plans to get all these approvals/permits to convert my existing permitted garage to ADU? I am only going to install new interior partitions, walls, ceilings, fixtures.

Change of use from garage (U) to ADU (R3) requires the structure in compliance with the current code. Fire resistant construction, light, ventilation, heating, minimum room area, minimum ceiling height, toilet/bath/shower spaces, glazing, emergency escape & rescue opening, means of egress, guard & window fall protection, smoke alarms, carbon-monoxide alarms, site address, flood-resistant construction, foundation/wall/roof-ceiling construction, gravity load resisting system, and lateral load resisting system etc. will need to be upgraded to be in compliance with the current codes.

CRC R110.2 Change in use. Changes in the character or use of an existing structure shall not be made except as specified in Chapter 11 of the California Fire Code and California Existing Building Code.

California Existing Building Code, Section 506 Change of Occupancy

506.1 Compliance. A change of occupancy shall not be made in any building unless that building is made to comply with the requirements of the California Building Code for the use or occupancy.

3. Where can we find the costs for building permits?

Cost of building permits are based on valuation of the proposed work. You may contact Building Permit Counter for the permit fees of your proposed work.

4. For existing garage conversions to an ADU, does the existing wall within 5' of the property line need to be fire-rated?

Yes, although the walls are existing they need to be modified to comply with the fire- rating and opening protection requirements of Table R302.1(1) or R302.1(2), whichever is applicable.

5. For existing garage conversions to an ADU, I intend to frame in the area where a garage door used to be. Do I need to install a new footing even if the wall will still be non-bearing?

Yes, all exterior walls must be supported by continuous footings per Section R403.1.

6. For existing garage conversions to an ADU, how do I comply with vapor retarder for existing concrete slab on grade?

The concrete floor will need to be provided with a vapor retarder as required in Section R506.2.3. Alternate materials can be proposed to prevent the passage of water vapors. The following alternate products are approved for use on an existing slab that does not have a vapor retarder:

ICC ESR#1413 – RedGard Waterproofing and Crack Prevention Membrane, C- Cure Pro-Red Waterproofing Membrane 963, CBP 232 Waterproofing and Anti- Fracture Membrane, and Jambo Waterproofing Membrane

ICC ESR #2417 – LATICRETE Hydro Ban

ICC ESR #2785 – Polycoat-Aquatight and Flexideck

ICC ESR#3474 – Mapelastac AquaDefense Waterproofing Membrane

Refer to LACO Research Bulletin RB11 for any other proposed alternate product.

7. Do I need to provide fire separation for an attached ADU?

Yes, a 1-hour fire-resistance rating is required per Section R302.3. Additionally, these common walls and floor/ceiling assemblies between units must also meet a sound transmission rating of STC 50 or higher, per section 1207 of the building code.

8. I would like to build a one-story addition to my existing garage to create an ADU. Do I need to reanalyze the entire structure?

Yes, you will need to as you are increasing the lateral load to the existing garage per Section 402.4.1 of the Existing Building Code. However, any existing lateral load-carrying structural element taking not more than 10% additional load (demand-capacity ratio) can remain unaltered.

9. Can a single heating unit be used to heat both the single-family dwelling and an attached ADU?

No. Section R303.9 requires every dwelling unit be provided with heating facilities. Mechanical code section 311.4 and section 6.1 of ASHRAE 62.2 prohibits the transfer of air between adjacent dwelling units. Therefore, a separate heating unit is required for each dwelling unit, as a single heating system cannot separately balance air in both units without transferring the air between them. Furthermore section 120.2(a) of the energy standards includes that each dwelling unit shall be controlled by an individual thermostatic control.

10. Can the ADU sewer be connected to the existing house drainage/sewer system, or does it need a separate sewer connection to the main public sewer?

It is allowed to connect to the existing drainage/sewer system or to install a separate sewer line.

ADU Fire Department Requirements FAQs

11. What are the Fire Department requirement for an ADU?

An automatic residential fire sprinkler system is required unless the primary residence is not provided with an automatic sprinkler system (R313.2). Referral to Fire Department is needed unless Form 195 for Fire Flow Availability meets the following:

- 1,250 GPM in a fire hazard zone
- 1,000 GPM for non-sprinklered and not in a fire hazard zone
- 500 GPM for sprinklered and not in a fire hazard zone

ADU attached to the main house cannot exceed 3,600 sq. ft. for the floor area of the entire structure unless approved by the Fire Department. The ADU shall be within 150 feet to all portions of the building exterior walls from a vehicular access roadway that is a minimum of 20 feet wide, paved with concrete or asphalt and does not exceed 15% grade.

ADU Electrical Requirements FAQs

12. Do I need to install a separate utility meter or a separate service panel for an ADU?

No, however, an applicant can request a separate utility meter or service panel if desired.

13. I want to provide power to the ADU from the existing service panel at the main dwelling. Is it necessary to upgrade my existing service or provide the ADU with its own service connection to the utility?

A new service to the ADU or upgrade of the existing service will not be necessary if residential load calculations are performed to confirm the existing service is sufficient. If the new calculated electrical loads exceed the rating of your existing service panel then an upgrade will be required.

14. Is electrical plan check required if I am upgrading the main service panel at the main dwelling to feed the ADU or installing a new service for the ADU?

Electrical plan check is not required for installation of a panel rated at 399 amps or less, 120/240V, single phase.

Residential load calculations shall be performed to verify the minimum rating of panel/service that will be required for the additional ADU electrical loads as per section 220.40.

New services require the installation of a grounding electrode system per section 250.50. Overhead service entrance conductors feeding the new panel shall be sized per section 310.15(B)(7) and be protected from physical damage per section 300.4.

Main service panels shall be rated appropriately for the environment where they will be installed. Outdoor panelboards need to be rated for wet or damp locations per section 408.37.

If there are more than six branch circuit breakers in the new service panel, a main overcurrent protection device is required per section 230.71.

15. My load calculations determined that the existing service will be sufficient for my ADU. What are the requirements if I want to provide power to the attached ADU via the existing main service panel or a new subpanel that is located at the detached ADU?

Residential load calculations shall be performed to verify the minimum rating of panel/service that will be required for the additional ADU electrical loads as per section 220.40.

When installing a subpanel in a detached ADU, a grounding electrode system for the new subpanel will be required. If there are more than six circuit breakers installed in the new subpanel, a main circuit breaker is required per section 225.33(A). The minimum rating for the main circuit breaker shall be 60 amperes per section 230.79(D).

For an attached ADU, new circuits can be added to the existing service panel provided that the load calculations confirm it is acceptable to add the proposed circuits.

16. Are there any restrictions on where I can install indoor electrical panels?

Circuit breakers, and thus the panels housing those circuit breakers, cannot be located in clothes closets or bathrooms per sections 240.24(D) and (E).

17. Am I required to install AFCI protection for branch circuits that will serve my ADU?

Per section 210.12(A), AFCI protection is required for all new branch circuits rated 120 volts, 15- or 20-amperes installed in kitchens, family rooms, dining rooms, living rooms, parlors, libraries, dens, bedrooms, sunrooms, recreation rooms, closets, hallways, laundry areas, and similar areas. This includes kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms, amongst the locations specified. Circuits in these areas that are modified, replaced, or extended shall have AFCI protection as well per section 210.12(B).

18. Am I required to install GFCI protection for receptacles that will serve my ADU?

Per section 210.8(A), GFCI protection is required for all new receptacles rated 120 volts, 15- or 20-amperes installed in bathrooms, garages, outdoors, crawl spaces, unfinished basements, kitchens, within 6 ft. of a sink, bathtub, or shower stall's outside edge, boathouses, and laundry areas.

19. Are there any additional receptacle requirements for my ADU?

In the locations specified in section 210.52, all new 120 volts, 15- or 20-ampere rated receptacles shall be tamper-resistant receptacles per section 406.12(A).

One receptacle is required at both the front and back of the dwelling per section 210.52(E)(1). These receptacles shall have a weatherproof enclosure, be listed as weather-resistant, and be GFCI protected per sections 406.9(B) and 210.8(B)(4).

20. I am installing new lighting in my ADU, do I have to comply with California Energy Efficiency Standards?

All new lighting installed in residential units is required to be rated as high efficacy as required by section 150.0(k), Table 150.0-A. At least one luminaire installed in bathrooms, laundry rooms, and utility rooms shall be controlled by a vacancy sensor per 150.0(k)(2)(J)

21. Are there any circuits that I am required to install in my new ADU?

Yes, two small appliance circuits, one laundry circuit (if providing a laundry area), and one bathroom circuit are all required to be installed per sections 210.11(C)(1), (2), and (3). A lighting circuit in habitable rooms and bathrooms is required per section 210.70(A)(1). A general receptacle outlet circuit shall be installed per section 210.52(A).

22. What are the Energy Code requirements for ADUs?

Please refer to the attached 2019 Quick Reference for ADUs in the following pages.