Single Family Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Standards and Requirements

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San Mateo Municipal Code Chapter 27.19 (*Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units)* establishes the development standards and requirements for ADUs and JADUs. This Ordinance went into effect on April 22, 2022, and was updated effective March 4, 2026. The approval process for compliant ADUs and JADUs is ministerial, with only a building permit and related permits required; a planning application with public notification is not required.

General Requirements – Lots with an existing or proposed single-family dwelling:

Number of ADUs - Any of the following may be combined on the same lot as a single family residence: 1 attached or conversion ADU, 1 detached new construction ADU, and 1 JADU (within the walls of an existing or proposed single family dwelling).

ADU Entrance - ADUs and JADUs must have a separate exterior entrance from the main home.

- Interior access to the main home is also required for a JADU that shares a bathroom and/or access to shared utilities (such as HVAC controls) with the main home.

Rental Terms - Both ADUs and JADUs are prohibited from being short-term rentals (rental period less than 30 days) and cannot be sold separately from the primary dwelling.

- JADUs that share a bathroom with the main home are also subject to owner occupancy on the premises (the owner may reside in any unit on the property – JADU, ADU, or main home).

Permit Review Required - ADUs and JADUs that meet all applicable standards in Chapter 27.19 only require a ministerial building permit.

- Discretionary Alternative - ADUs that do not meet all of these requirements can seek approval under an alternative discretionary review process. The Zoning Administrator is the decision maker for this discretionary review process and will take action based on the findings contained in Zoning Code Section 27.19.045. Public notification is required prior to final action and the Zoning Administrator's decision can be appealed.

ADU Development Standards – New Construction ADUs[1]

Definition - An ADU is an attached or detached residential dwelling unit that provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, is accessory to the primary residential dwelling unit(s), includes permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation, and is located on the same lot as an existing or proposed primary residence.

Maximum Unit Size - The Municipal Code does not set a specific maximum size for ADUs. Up to 800 square feet of ADU living area is exempt from a lot's floor area ratio (FAR); for larger ADUs, the maximum unit size is set by the FAR of the underlying zoning district. An ADU must also be smaller than the primary dwelling unit (unless the primary dwelling is less than 800 square feet).

[1] ADUs that are created by conversion of existing permitted space (such as a garage, accessory structure, etc.) are considered "exempt." Note that additions of new square footage to existing space for ADU living area will be subject to the ADU development standards.

Maximum Height

- Attached ADU - 24 feet to top plateline and 32 feet to roof peak, as measured from existing grade.
- Detached ADU - 18 feet to top plateline and 24 feet to roof peak, as measured from existing grade.

Setbacks

- Front Yard
  - As required in the underlying zoning district for new construction ADUs over 800 square feet.
  - For ADUs 800 square feet or less that meet requirements of a "state exempt[2]" ADU, no front setback is required.

- Side and Rear Yards
  - Minimum of four feet from side and rear lot lines.
  - Detached ADU in the rear 1/3 lot that otherwise meets requirements of accessory structures in required yards in R1[3] also do not require setbacks.

Daylight Plane - All ADUs[4] shall be within a daylight plan, which starts at a height of 12 feet and extends into the parcel at a 45-degree angle, from the nearest side and rear property lines.

Parking Requirements

- No off-street parking is required for any ADU or JADU.
- No replacement parking is required when an existing garage, carport, covered parking structure, or uncovered parking space is converted to an ADU or JADU or demolished in conjunction with construction of an ADU.

Voluntary Parking for ADUs/ JADUs - While not required, providing off-street parking for ADUs is encouraged.

- Voluntary parking must be provided on the same lot, and may be located within setbacks.
- ADU parking may be provided as tandem stalls.
- If a garage or carport is converted or demolished, the existing driveway & curb cut may remain to provide parking area.
- A maximum of 2 parking stalls may be provided for each ADU or JADU.
- Maximum driveway width for single car garages may extended be up to 20 ft. (typical maximum is 17 ft.) to accommodate ADU or JADU parking.
- A garage or carport can be constructed in the same footprint & to the same setbacks as a second-story ADU above, outside of the front yard setback.

Architectural Standards[5]

- Second story windows up to 5 feet from finished floor must be obscured or glazed when within 5 feet of a lot line with an abutting residential lot.
- Any exterior staircase shall be setback 5 feet from nearest lot line and landing must be limited to minimum area to allow in/egress as specified by California Building Code.
- Balconies and Decks
  - Second story decks or balconies cannot be larger than 50 ft for two-story ADUs.
  - No portion of the second story deck or balcony can be within the setback of the underlying zone, regardless of ADU setbacks.
- Decks cannot face adjacent residential properties

[2] This includes conversion ADUs, or a new detached ADU up to 800 sq. ft. that meets 4-foot side and rear setbacks
[3] For the requirements for accessory structures in the rear 1/3 of the parcel, refer to Section 27.70.
[4] State Exempt ADUs are not subject to daylight plane requirements.
[5] For Nonexempt ADUs

JADU Development Standards

Definition - A JADU is a unit that is contained entirely within an existing or proposed single-family residence, including conversion of attached garages. JADUs cannot be located in detached accessory structures.

Maximum Unit Size - Maximum size for JADUs is 500 square feet.

Limit on Number of Units - One per residential lot with a Single-Family Dwelling Structure.

Setbacks - Must comply with underlying zoning district.

Deed Restriction[6] - A deed restriction must be recorded to indicate: the JADU cannot be sold separately, the approved size and attributes of the JADU. A copy of the deed must be given to the occupant.

Owner Occupancy - If JADU has shared bathroom with the existing structure, the owner must live either in the JADU or the primary residence. Owner occupancy is not required when the JADU has a separate bathroom.

Design Standards

- Off-street parking is not required, but is encouraged.
- The cooking facility shall meet efficiency kitchen requirements.[7]
- A bathroom may be provided within the unit or shared with the primary residence.
- JADU must have its own separate exterior entrance. An interior connection may also be provided between the main home and JADU, but is only required when the JADU shares a bathroom with the main home.
- Fire wall separation and noise attenuation measures that are required for ADUs are not required for JADUs.

Other Standards and Considerations

Utility Connections **-** For detached ADUs, the City may require new or separate utility connections. The new connection may be subject to a connection fee or capacity charges based on ADU size or number of fixtures. JADUs do not require a separate connection.

Address Assignment **-** ADUs and JADUs will be assigned separate addresses prior to permit issuance.

Fire Sprinklers **-** Verify requirements with the Fire Marshal.

- If the main house has fire sprinklers, sprinklers may be required for the ADU.
- When there are no sprinklers in the main home, sprinklers are generally not required for an ADU or JADU. However, while ADU or JADU construction alone shall not be a trigger for requiring sprinklers in the primary residence, if additional work is proposed to the main home this may trigger sprinkler requirements for both the main home and proposed ADU or JADU.
- Where site specific conditions exist, (such as driveway length for fire access, insufficient hydrant coverage or water flow, etc.) additional mitigation may be required by the Fire Marshal to meet fire safety requirements. In this case, providing fire sprinklers in the ADU may be one option to meet requirements.

Solar - Newly constructed detached ADUs are subject to the Energy Code requirement to provide solar panels if the unit is newly constructed and non-manufactured. The panels can be installed on the ADU or on the primary dwelling unit.

Fees - Permitting fees are applied by the City's adopted fee schedule. Note that School District Developer Impact fees may also apply.

[6] Deed restriction will be drafted by City staff for applicant signature & recordation before permit issuance.

[7] Must have a permanent cooking appliance(s), sink, refrigerator, and cabinets and counter area proportional to the size of the JADU.