



January 28, 2020

AARP VT Testimony – S. 237 Housing, Accessory Dwelling Units

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on bill S.237. AARP VT supports the provisions on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in bill S. 237. We have long supported efforts to increase affordable housing options, especially for our aging population.

We believe that ADUs can create additional housing units without the overhead of large development projects that require large plots of land. They allow for increased housing choices in the lowest density areas of a community and have a minimal design impact on neighborhood character. For the homeowner, an ADU provides a flexible living arrangement to meet the needs of multi-generational families including older adults interested in aging in place.

Preferences of Older Adults:

- ¾ of people 50+ want to stay in homes and communities as long as possible.
- Homesharing is on the rise, up from 2% in 2014 to 16% in 2018
- 1/3 homeowners interested in building ADUs for help, income, and companionship¹

A surge in single-person households: The popular vision of a household is inaccurate and outdated. Single-person households exceed nuclear family households.

- Households are smaller with nearly 30% being single family households
- Its estimated by 2025 (census data) that 75-85% of households will be without children
- There are more than twice as many two-bedroom units as there are studios and one-bedrooms combines.
- We need to update our understanding of the type of housing needed.

These preferences — coupled with the rapid aging of the states' population overall and decrease in households with children — will continue to boost the demand for smaller homes in more compact neighborhoods.

¹ <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/community/info-2018/2018-home-community-preference.html>

ADUs offer flexibility to homeowners:

- Empty nesters: can build an ADU and move into it, then rent out the main house for supplemental income or make it available to their adult children.
- Families with young children: can use an ADU as housing for a nanny or au pair or even a grandparent or two, who can then help raise their grandkids and be assisted themselves as they age.
- Individuals in need of care: can reside in an ADU to be near family members, or they can use the ADU to house a live-in aide. (In fact, ADUs can be an affordable and more comforting alternative to an assisted-living facility or nursing home.)
- Home Buyers: can look forward to the rental income from an ADU to help pay their mortgage or finance home improvements, especially in expensive housing markets.
- Home-based workers: can use an ADU as their office or workshop.
- Home owners: can use an ADU for guests or as housing for friends or loved ones who aren't yet financially independent, such as new high school or college graduates; need temporary housing due to an emergency or while renovating their own home; have disabilities but can live independently if family reside nearby.

Barriers that make it difficult to build ADUs: Well-intentioned but burdensome rules can stymie the creation of ADUs. ADU-related zoning codes should be restrictive enough to prevent undesirable development but flexible enough that they actually get built.

- Complex design compatibility criteria and approval steps – overly complicated regulatory system
- Parking requirements beyond those required for the primary dwelling
- Restrictions that limit ADUs to certain geographic areas, particular zoning categories or to large lots
- Caps on square footage relative to the primary house that make it easy to add an ADU to a large home but hard or impossible to add one to a small home

Encourage ADUs by:

- Allowing ADUs to be permitted where single-family housing is permitted.
- Reduce situations where ADUs are only allowed conditionally. Discretionary review processes add time and risk to the development process, and often stymie amateur mom-and-pop builders (who build the vast majority of ADUs).
- Eliminate the parking requirements.
- Minimize the impacts of the regulatory system and fees associated with the permitting process.