

Impact Analysis of Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations in Denver

Executive Summary - Erik Braaten

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) have long been a part of the conversation among planners, researchers, activists, neighborhood residents and decision makers in the City and County of Denver and recognized by as a viable way to increase housing stock through gentle density. ADUs can exist as in a form attached to a primary residential structure or as a detached standalone structure. At present, ADUs are not allowed citywide per the Denver Zoning Code. Within the areas allowed by the Denver Zoning Code allowing for ADUs, there are minimum siting requirements that a lot must adhere to for an ADU to be permitted by planners with the Department of Community Planning and Development. Zoning requirements are described in detail within the Denver Zoning Code, but no citywide inventory of lots exists which could be used by the public, planners, and decision makers to understand the extent to which lots could potentially support the development of ADUs. Accessory dwelling units can exist as in a form attached to a primary residential structure or as a detached standalone structure. This report focuses on the regulations for detached accessory dwelling units.

This report has been prepared for the Office of Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval and University of Colorado Denver College of Architecture and Planning. Councilwoman Sandoval has been instrumental in the rezoning of two Denver neighborhoods within the district she represents, Chaffee Park and Sloan's Lake, and her office is working towards the rezoning of large parts of District 1 neighborhoods Regis and West Highland to allow ADUs. This report aims to provide an inventory of opportunities and proposes recommendations to expand the allowance of detached ADUs in Denver and provide homeowners greater opportunities to create ADUs and thus housing in Denver.

Background

ADUs are lauded as a way to increase housing density, provide income to homeowners, and provide options for seniors to age-in-place without dramatically changing the character of a neighborhood. The City and County of Denver has identified the potential of ADUs in the city's land use and transportation plan approved in 2019, Blueprint Denver, which specifically calls for finding ways to lessen requirements on ADUs. Many cities in the United States and Canada are working to liberalize their codes to allow for greater ADU development. This project could add to the conversations had by planners and have effects beyond the City and County of Denver.



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Methodology

A novel geodatabase was created using geospatial data made publicly available by the City and County of Denver. All Single-Unit and Two-Unit zoned areas of Denver in the Suburban, Urban, and Urban Edge neighborhood contexts were examined. A method was developed to create a database of zone lots to test various regulatory scenarios based upon assessor parcel data in Denver. Zone lots were tested against minimum lot sizes, building coverages were calculated and tested against building coverage maximums, and contextual information including city council district, statistical neighborhood, and alley access were joined to each zone lot. Finally, specifics found within the zoning code that apply to certain zoning districts were applied to explore how those requirements affect ADU outcomes.

Analysis

When the factors of zoning, land use, minimum lot size, and maximum building coverage are combined and paired against one another, it is found that these factors eliminate many homeowners from being able to use their properties to build detached ADUs. The findings of this project indicate that under current regulations, less than half of zone lots currently zoned to allow ADUs are likely to be eligible to be able to allow a detached ADU. If all Single-Unit and Two-Unit zoned areas of the Suburban, Urban, and Urban Edge contexts were zoned to allow ADUs, under current regulations up to two thirds would likely be eligible to allow a detached ADU. Current regulations more dramatically limit the usability of zone lots in the Urban and Urban Edge neighborhood contexts as they currently exist. If the Suburban neighborhood context was opened for ADUs beyond the one district which currently allows it, there would be a great opportunity for the development of ADUs in Denver.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The current zoning requirements found within the Denver Zoning Code limit many zone lots and thus homeowners from using their properties to build detached ADUs. ADUs have been identified as a desirable tool by the City and County of Denver to address housing shortages and promote affordable housing opportunities. This report recommends that more parts of the city be zoned to allow for ADUs, that minimum lot sizes not be applied to the detached ADU building form, and that the maximum building coverage per zone lot be standardized to 50% versus a variable 37.5% or 50% standard. Further recommendations for research include examining the potential size of detached ADUs, examining the details of setbacks and siting on lots in different neighborhood contexts, and determining if two-unit land uses would be appropriate for ADU development. Based on the findings of this report these policy and research recommendations aim to provide for greater flexibility for homeowners to help address housing in Denver.



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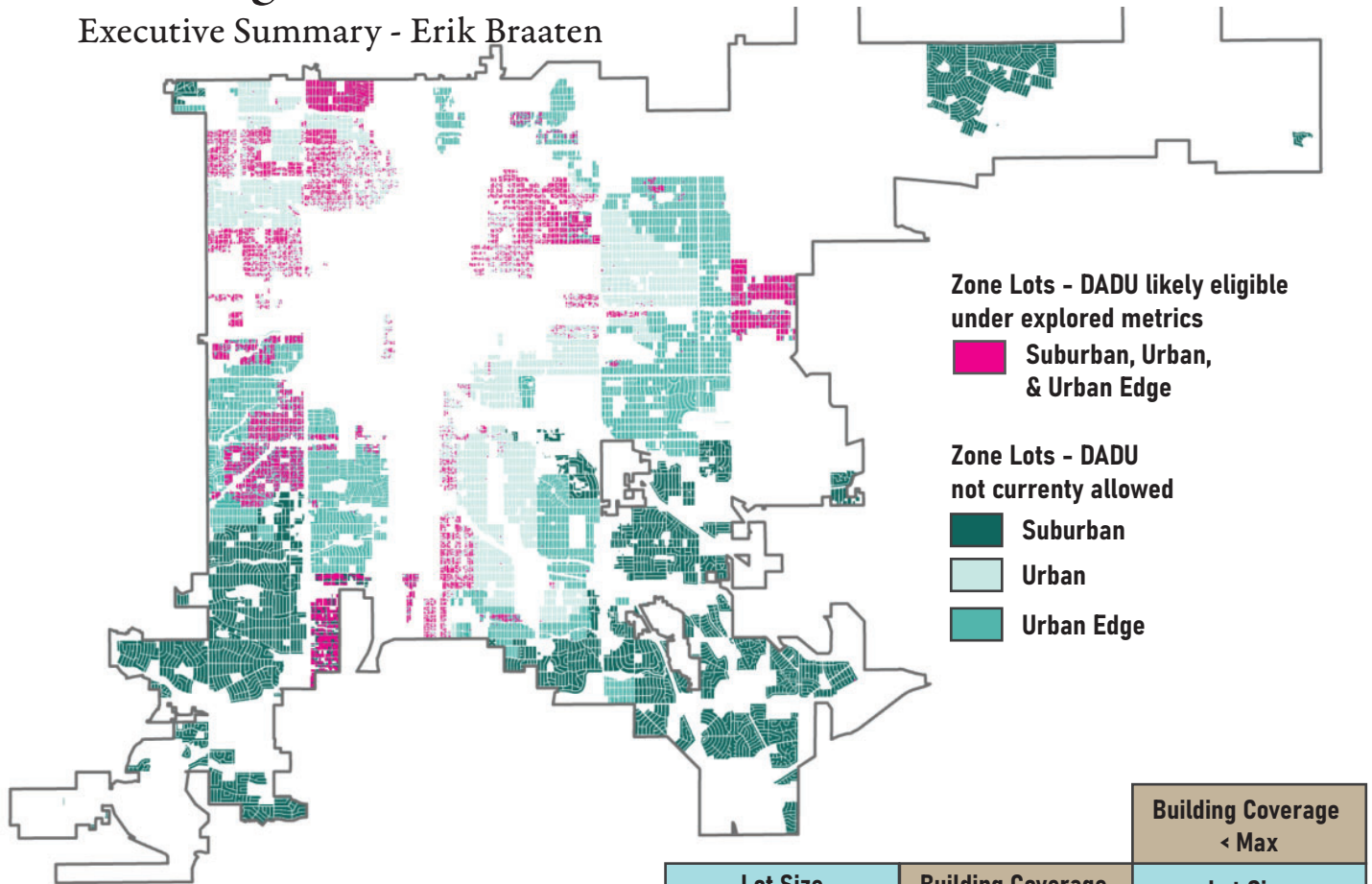


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Zone Lots - DADU likely eligible under explored metrics

Suburban, Urban, & Urban Edge

Zone Lots - DADU not currently allowed

Suburban

Urban

Urban Edge

Neighborhood Context	Zone Lots*	Zone District Allows ADU	Single-Unit Land Use	Lot Size > Min	Building Coverage < Max	Building Coverage < Max
				Single-Unit Land Use	Single-Unit Land Use	Lot Size > Min
Suburban (S)	32,867	1,088	987	568	983	568
Urban (U)	39,252	19,091	14,562	9,615	8,489	6,213
Urban Edge (E)	38,400	10,860	8,882	7,925	8,063	7,313
	110,519	31,039	24,431	22,419	18,108	14,094
If DADUs allowed citywide	110,519	110,519	101,169	87,688	81,516	74,179

*Single Unit & Two Unit Zoning Categories

Less than half of zone lots currently zoned to allow DADUs are likely eligible under current regulations.

Further removal and/or lessening of requirements will allow more homeowners to build a DADU if they choose and help address the lack of housing stock found in the City and County of Denver.