



You can add an accessory dwelling unit to an existing home in many different ways, making them a uniquely flexible housing option.

Are accessory dwelling units an option in your community?

The Polk County Housing Trust Fund and AARP Iowa recently surveyed metro communities to find out about accessory dwelling unit (ADU) policies around Greater Des Moines. Communities responded that ADUs are allowed in a variety of places, although local rules and standards vary widely.

Eight of 12 local governments that responded to the survey allow ADUs in some fashion today, and more told us they are considering allowing them in the future. Our survey is intended to raise awareness about local regulations and encourage policies and procedures that are homeowner-friendly and easy to navigate. Small differences in local policy can be the deciding factor in whether ADUs are practical to build.

ADUs are allowed in at least some areas	Ankeny	Des Moines	Indianola	Johnston	Norwalk	Pleasant Hill	Polk County*	Urbandale
With streamlined approval	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
With additional steps		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓

Altoona shared that it could allow ADUs in new developments but that no proposal has come forward to do so yet.

*Polk County refers to areas in the county that are not part of a city.

What is an accessory dwelling unit (ADU)?

An ADU is a smaller home that shares the same lot with a larger home. They can be added in a variety of ways – attached to a house or garage, or even free-standing in the back yard.

Why would I want one at my house?

An ADU helps your family get the most from your home through all phases of life. They can house family members like an aging relative or an adult child. They can be rented for extra household income.

This fact sheet does not reflect all the details of local policies. Always contact your local government’s building officials before starting your project.

Where can I get more information?

Find more information about accessory dwelling units and local policies on our website, **PCHTF.ORG/adu**



Your community's **zoning code** sets many policies for when ADUs are allowed.

As communities update their codes, some are choosing to allow more ADU options.

Polk County changed its zoning policy in August 2023 to allow ADUs throughout all residential areas.

Johnston also expanded ADU choices in a May 2023 zoning update.



Des Moines approved changes in May 2022 to allow ADUs in far more areas, and local nonprofit HOME, Inc. built this demonstration ADU in the Oak Park neighborhood.

Trends in local policies

Local policies for ADUs vary widely, but here are some current trends to expect based on our recent survey:

- The size of the ADU is usually limited (cities vary between 650 ft² and 1200 ft²) and the ADU must generally be smaller than the main residence.
- While ADUs come in all shapes and sizes, your community may require your ADU to be attached to the main residence, not a stand-

alone building. Or you may be required to build an ADU that matches the main house in look and style.

- Several communities say they'll allow shared utility connections between the main house and the ADU. You will want to check policies from your local utilities as well.
- Expect to need off-street parking for your ADU. You will typically need at least 1 or 2 spaces on top of what is required for the main house.

- While ADUs can often be rented, cities may require a rental certificate or they may require that either the main house or the ADU is always owner-occupied.

For further reading

Our colleagues at AARP Iowa joined with us to conduct this survey. AARP is a leading advocate for ADUs nationally. Discover their high quality ADU resources at **AARP.ORG/ADU**.

Local contacts Here's who to contact for more information on ADUs in your community.

Altoona: John Shaw, Community Development Director, 515-957-5114

Ankeny: Community Development Department; 515-963-3550

Clive: Community Development Department, 515-223-6221

Des Moines: Zoning Enforcement Div., DZ@dmgov.org, 515-283-4207

Indianola: Community Development Department, 515-961-9430

Johnston: Community Development Department, 515-727-7778

Norwalk: Community Development Department; 515-981-9530

Pleasant Hill: Madeline Sturms, Assistant City Mgr., 515-309-9464

Polk County*: Public Works Department; e-mail publicworks@polkcountyiowa.gov

Urbandale: Community Development Dept.; 515-278-3935

Waukee: Community Development Department; 515-978-9533

West Des Moines: Linda Schemmel, Development Coordinator, 515-222-3620

City not listed? Contact City Hall and ask to speak with the community development department or someone who handles building permitting issues.

ADU policies vary widely. Always contact local officials before starting your project.

**Polk County refers to unincorporated areas not part of a city.*