

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT PUBLIC INPUT

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SUMMARY

The Northfield City Council is considering changes to the existing Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) policies to create more opportunities to built ADUs in the city.

Wishing for agreement on some of the proposed changes, Northfield citizens were invited to attend an Open House where they had the opportunity to talk with the mayor, council members, city staff, Planning Commission commissioners, and other local experts on the topic.

At the Open House, citizens were encouraged to fill out a six-question *Accessory Dwelling Unit Public Input Sheet*. Fifty-four individuals filled out a questionnaire.

Briefly, a summary of the six questions is:

- Owner-occupied properties should be allowed a rental license for an ADU even if currently restricted by the 20% block limit rental-licensing rule. Most respondents emphasized this could only be true if the property is owner-occupied.
- When adding an ADU additional parking should be required. However, some thought there could be allowances made for certain types of renters such as family members.
- An ADU should be the same size or smaller than the existing structure.
- An ADU should be compatible with the primary dwelling and neighborhood. The definition of what is compatible should be broad.
- ADUs should not be exempt from the 30% rule. The real concern is balancing green space and the need to have sufficient permeable surface area for water drainage.
- No determination could be made from these respondents if ADUs should be limited to 1,000 sq. ft. of living area instead of 864 sq. ft. There seemed to be confusion about a) what the real question was and b) what the definition is of living area and square footage.

METHODOLOGY – how the survey data was analyzed.

The responses from those who filled out the *Accessory Dwelling Unit Public Input Sheet* were analyzed twice. First, the responses were tallied to determine how each respondent answered the question: yes, no, maybe (and variations of maybe), or did not answer the question. Second, all but 5 of the respondents left at least one free response or comment. In total there were 175 comments. These were read and reread and then grouped into categories or themes to help illustrate why or why not a proposed change to the ADU policies was supported and to expose suggested alternatives and novel ideas that came from the respondents.

The next section contains a detailed description of the findings. For each question, there is a summary of the tallied responses and a summary of the free responses.

DETAILS OF THE FINDINGS

Question 1: Should additional parking space be required when adding an ADU?

QUESTION 1			
YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER
29	13	8	4

For this question, it is clear that the respondents think additional parking space must be required when adding an ADU. In addition to answering the question, 34 respondents included a comment. These comments justified the need for requiring additional parking spaces. They also highlight potential alternatives to the parking issue.

Winter parking (10 comments) was the primary concern and the main reason for requiring additional parking for an ADU. The ‘no’s’ and ‘maybe’s’ (to requiring additional parking) justified their answers by suggesting alternatives to the problem of winter parking, such as to go to alternate side parking and get rid of the winter parking restriction except for when there is a snow emergency.

The ‘no’s’ and ‘maybe’s’ also justified their answers by providing solutions to the issue of parking. They suggested: parking spaces should depend on the size of ADU, type of renter, and whether or not the renter has a car.

Question 2: Should an ADU be required to be smaller than the existing home?

QUESTION 2			
YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER
30	7	13	4

There is clear agreement on Question 2 that the ADU should be smaller than – or at the very least not bigger than - the existing home.

Most of the 24 comments directly supported the respondents' answer choice. Nine of the twenty-four respondent's comments specified that the size of the ADU should depend on the size of the lot, the size of the existing home, or that the ADU should be scaled to the lot size and existing structure. In other words, perhaps exceptions could be allowed.

For example, one respondent said,

“Yes. For sure. [That the ADU should be smaller than the existing home]. Again, if there is some particular situation of a small existing house on a huge lot, there might be a variance.”

Question 3: Current regulations allow an ADU with a footprint of 864 sq. ft. with a 24 ft. height limit as part of a detached garage. The Planning Commission proposal would expand the use to a 1,000 sq. ft. footprint and 24 ft. height with no requirement to be part of a garage. Should ADUs be limited to 1,000 sq. ft. of living area instead?

QUESTION 3			
YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER
17	18	4	15

There is no clear answer to this question. Fifteen of the 54 respondents chose not to answer this question. There was some confusion about what the actual question was and what the terms 'sq. ft. of living area' and 'footprint' meant.

QUESTION 3 COMMENTS					
	YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER	TOTAL
HEIGHT	3	3	0	3	9
SQ. FT.	4	6	1	1	12
OTHER	0	1	1	3	5
TOTAL	7	10	2	7	26

Of the 26 comments, 12 simply reiterated why the respondent was or was not in favor of allowing up to a 1,000 sq. ft. living space ADU.

An individual in support of a smaller ADU said,

“1000 sq. ft. is too big for ADUs in our Northfield neighborhoods. Small ADU is a great idea - 400 to 720 sf total.”

An individual in support of a larger ADU said,

“Max living space, not foundation size and height limit. Reasonable max = 1200.”

Nine comments focused on the height of an ADU. All nine comments spoke about the need for ADUs to have some kind of height restriction, but there is variation in what that restriction should be

“ADUs should be limited to the height of the property dwelling.”

“They should be smaller profile than the main house.”

“Keep the 864 sq. ft. and 24 ft. height requirement.”

These comments help to demonstrate the division and confusion on this question.

Question 4: Should ADUs be exempt from the 30% lot coverage limit as proposed?

QUESTION 4			
YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER
14	25	8	7

Most of the respondents stated ‘no’, that ADUs should not be exempt from the 30% lot coverage. Of the thirty-three comments, 12 emphasized the need to maintain a certain amount of green space and 12 emphasized setting a reasonable lot coverage limit that is contextual.

QUESTION 4 COMMENTS					
	YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER	TOTAL
GREEN SPACE	2	8	2	0	12
SIZE	6	4	2	0	12
COMPATIBILITY	0	2	1	0	3
OTHER	1	0	3	2	6
TOTAL	9	14	8	2	33

The 'no' group (to exempting the 30% coverage limit) most often cited concern about green space and the drainage of water.

"No. Having green space or permeable space for stormwater management is important too!

The 'yes' group said yes to exemption, but that there must be limits set for adequate water management.

"Yes, but a limit should be set. Reasonable = 70%? Concern for ratio of permeable/non-permeable surface area for water management."

On the other hand, one respondent in the 'yes' group had an entirely different idea of what green space is and said,

"Higher density throughout town preserves green space designation in town and outside of city limits."

Question 5: Should ADUs have a requirement for compatibility with the primary dwelling and surrounding neighborhood?

QUESTION 5			
YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER
42	7	1	4

There is resounding agreement that ADUs should be compatible with the primary dwelling and surrounding neighborhood but with a caveat: what the definition of compatible means. Twenty-eight comments were left. Most people who answered yes to this question qualified their answer:

"Yes, but compatibility is not replication - can be harmony. Compatibility doesn't mean replication."

“Yes. Compatibility can be achieved without exactly matching the existing dwelling. ADU design should demonstrate compatibility in color, materials, scale of opening, and geometry of rooflines. Compatibility can mean complimentary - not matching.”

Two respondents spoke about how compatibility will increase the resale value of the property.

“Yes, absolutely but compatible does not mean exactly the same style - smaller elements like similar windows or doorway moldings and some sense of size, scale, and roof pitch would make the ADU fit in and the property have a higher resale value for the owner.”

Question 6: Should owner-occupied properties be allowed a rental license for an ADU even if currently restricted by the 20% block limit rental-licensing rule?

QUESTION 6			
YES	NO	MAYBE	DID NOT ANSWER
29	14	2	9

More people (29) said yes then said no (14) to allowing owner-occupied properties a rental license even if currently constricted by the 20% rule. Thirty comments were left for this question. Most of the comments simply reinforced the respondents' answer to the question. Eleven of the comments stressed that owner occupancy was mandatory.

FINAL IMPRESSIONS

Summary of the Questions

All but one, Question 3, of the six questions, had a clear answer.

- Question 3 asked if ADUs should be limited up to 1,000 sq. ft. of living area. Only two-thirds of the respondents answered this question, and they were equally split: one-third said yes and one-third said no.

For four of the questions, while most of the respondents answered the questions with a yes or no, they often qualified their answers with a comment. Their comments provided suggestions or exceptions to the proposed rule.

- Question 1 - Parking should be required when adding an ADU, but there could be some allowable exceptions: family members, the elderly, and those without a car.

- Question 2 - The size of the ADU should be smaller than or at least not larger than the existing structure. However, it was also felt that the ADU should be proportional to the size of the existing structure and lot, and a table or matrix should be created that incorporates all these variables to determine the maximum size and location of the ADU.
- Question 4 - There was a definite no to exempting ADUs from the 30% coverage limit. However, there was also excellent commentary from those saying yes to the exemption. They say some limit should still be required, but it can be contextual meaning there could be room for exceptions to the 30% rule.
- Question 5 - The ADU should be compatible with the existing structure, but the definition of what is compatible should be broad.

The idea of a context or conditions is expressed in Questions 2, 4, and 5. Whatever ADU gets built must a) fit proportionally with the lot and existing structure, b) have adequate green space for proper water drainage, and c) be generally compatible with existing surroundings.

Question 6 was a definite yes that the 20% block limit rental-licensing rule should be lifted and a rental license permitted for owner-occupied ADUs.

Major Concerns

There is a great concern for balancing affordable housing needs and more attainable rules for building ADUs with the need to preserve Northfield's historic and quality neighborhoods and to use green space sustainably.

Education Needs

There seems to be a need to educate the community about the concepts of sprawl, infill and green space.

These terms need to better definition: what is a square foot of living area and a footprint.

Questions from the Respondents

Will this solve the affordable housing problem?
 How will ADUs affect property taxes?
 What happens when the property changes hands?
 Does this include mobile homes?

Suggestions from the Respondents

Make incremental changes. Make no more than two at a time.

Do an analysis of what increasing density means.

Look at regulations from other cities, i.e., Durango, CO.

Make sure each ADU goes through an articulated review.

A very straightforward formula, matrix, or table should be created to show all of the allowable percentages of an ADU.