



Livable for a Lifetime
Applying Universal Design
in homes & communities

Accessory Apartments

What are Accessory Apartments?

Accessory Apartments, also known as **Accessory Dwelling Units** or “**Granny Flats**”, are separate, independent dwelling units either located on the same property as the primary single family home or within the primary single family home itself. Examples include an apartment over a garage, a basement apartment or an extension to the existing house.



The Benefits of Accessory Apartments

The benefits of accessory apartments are many. Most people want to grow old in their own home: the concept of “aging in place” or “livable for a lifetime.” Staying in one’s home is often unrealistic when the home is no longer affordable or when one or more family members experience a debilitating chronic illness or a disability.

When affordability is an issue, homeowners and especially senior home owners living on a fixed income, benefit from the income derived from the accessory apartment. The occupant of the accessory apartment benefits from the ability to rent an apartment in a tight market or to live free or at a reduced rent in exchange for assistance to the residents of the single family home. The community benefits by providing another affordability option. According to the region’s State of Housing report, there is a deficit of 992 rental units to supply those below 30% of the area median family income.

Additional benefits of sharing include providing a safety net, a feeling of well-being, and, indeed, people live longer in their own home. For people with a debilitating chronic illness or a disability, an accessory apartment can be occupied by a caregiver.

The Need for Accessory Apartments

People across the lifespan want to live independently. Seniors and people with disabilities are most in need of support to accomplish this. Over the next 17 years, our region will experience an increase in population and a dramatic increase in its senior population.



Of people 65 and older, 8% have a self care disability, 36% of people 75 and older live in households with an annual income under \$20,000, and 51% of people 85 and older have a self-care disability. Regardless of age, those with a disability constitute more than 15% of the population.

Issues surrounding Accessory Apartments

The occupancy of accessory apartments is often limited to no more than one family or two or three persons. In some cases the occupant must be related to the owners of the single family dwelling; often the primary dwelling unit must be occupied by the owner. In other cases, the small size of the lot and well and septic limitations can further impede the development of an accessory apartment. These issues limit the flexibility of accessory apartments and the needs of those populations that stand to benefit most from accessory apartments.

Next Steps

Review the enclosed table to find out how your locality regulates accessory apartments, particularly if you or someone you know would benefit from them. Are these regulations flexible enough to meet your needs? If not, please let us know and let your local elected officials know as well. Accessory apartments are one important step in achieving “livable for a lifetime” in our homes and communities.

For more information, please contact Bill Wanner at the Thomas Jefferson Planning District, wwanner@tjpd.org or (434) 979-7310. Please visit our website at www.tjpd.org

Jurisdiction	Definition	Occupant Restrictions (Main Residence)	Occupant Restrictions (Accessory Apartments)
Albemarle	A separate, independent dwelling unit contained within the structure of and clearly subordinate to a single-family detached dwelling, as distinguished from a duplex or other two-family dwelling.		-an accessory apartment shall be permitted only within the main dwelling to which is accessory. Usage of freestanding garage or other accessory structure for an accessory apartment is expressly prohibited. -the owner must reside in any dwelling to which the apartment unit is accessory or the apartment unit itself.
Charlottesville	Interior and exterior accessory apartments—requirements for each type.	One of the two dwelling units on the subject property must be occupied by the owner of the property.	No accessory apartment may be occupied by more than two persons.
Fluvanna		To add a unit, must prove that the parcel can be subdivided into its own lot and meet requirements of the zoning subdivision ordinance.	-no definition for occupancy—no restrictions.
Greene	A completely separate, private apartment unit installed in the extra space of an owner-occupied single-family detached dwelling Shall be designed so that the appearance of the building in which it is located remains that of a single family detached dwelling.	The owner must occupy at least one of the dwelling units. The accessory apartment will expire with change of ownership.	The tenant of the accessory apartment shall be a legal family member or caregiver.
Louisa	A separate, independent dwelling unit located on the same property as the primary unit.	-A dwelling unit within a single-family dwelling may equal the existing finished square footage of the primary dwelling, such as a basement, attic, or additional level; or -A dwelling unit attached to the primary single-family dwelling, or as a dwelling unit located above a detached accessory unit; that shall be no more than one half size of the finished square footage of the primary dwelling unit located on the subject property.	- Occupancy of accessory apartments shall be limited to no more than one family or up to three persons (as permitted by code), and shall not be rented in less than six month increments, and the primary dwelling unit must be occupied by the owner of the subject property or an immediate family member.
Nelson	-do not have a specific definition for accessory apartments. -just refer to units as apartments (basement, mother in-law, etc)	-have to meet septic system requirements of the health department.	