

Excerpt from - City Administrator Report for February 22, 2019

Planning Division

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Accessory Dwelling Units

The City Council recently considered an ordinance to amend existing regulations for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). In response to questions about the proposed changes, the Council suspended further action to provide staff an opportunity to engage with the community and provide additional information.

Background:

Accessory Dwelling Units have been allowed in Northfield since the adoption of the Land Development Code in 2012-13. They are a permitted accessory use in all residential districts. ADUs are governed by Use Specific Standards set in Article 2.10.4 of the LDC. These are the standards where changes are being considered. Current regulations allow an ADU with a footprint of 864 square feet and a height of 24 feet. This allows a floor area of 1728 square feet, but part of it must be a garage. (Height is measured at the midpoint of a pitched roof.) Current policy requires ADUs to be part of a detached garage, provide an extra parking space and structures are counted against the Building Area Ratio (lot coverage) of the parcel. ADUs can currently be rented by the owner if a rental license is available.

Guided by the City's Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plan, the Planning Commission and staff analyzed why more ADUs aren't being built in Northfield and researched best practices for their optimum utilization. Barriers and issues identified are as follows:

1. Rental restriction - #1 reason interested homeowners do not build an ADU is that no rental license is available.
2. Building Area Ration - #2 reason interested homeowners do not build is due to the 30% lot coverage limitation.
3. Carriage house model is unfriendly to seniors.
4. No detached garage possible.
5. Building code issues with garage conversion.
6. Aesthetic requirements add costs.
7. Adding parking not feasible, too expensive, or not needed.
8. There is a strong need for housing units in town.

The Planning Commission recommended policy changes intended to allow property owners the option to build units which may better suit their needs, make the approval process simple, and impose as few costs as possible. They suggest increasing the allowable building footprint to accommodate single-level living; to remove the Building Area Ratio limit and lot size restriction; and to make ADUs an option on smaller infill lots. The Commission also recommended removing design standards and the parking requirement to help with affordability, and also to allow all ADUs to be rented.