

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS HENRY SANTANA, ENRIQUE PEPEN, SHARON DURKAN, BREADON, FITZGERALD, LOUIJEUNE, MEJIA, MURPHY, AND WEBER



CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING LEGALIZING ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUs) IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

WHEREAS, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are self-contained, non-transient dwelling units on the same lot as a main residential property — or, put more simply, ADUs are small homes that are built inside or alongside a main home, and can be adapted to serve a wide range of people; build wealth for homeowners; and provide affordable living space for friends, multigenerational family members, or those looking to downsize; *and*

WHEREAS, ADUs may be attached (adjacent to a main building), detached (a separate stand-alone structure from the main building), or internal (located within the main building); *and*

WHEREAS, Boston is the only exemption from Massachusetts' 2024 statewide ADU law, which allows homeowners to add an ADU in single-family zoning districts in every one of the 350 cities and towns in Massachusetts other than Boston; *and*

WHEREAS, Mattapan adopted an updated neighborhood zoning plan in 2024, making it the only neighborhood in Boston allowing by-right ADUs on owner-occupied residential lots; *and*

WHEREAS, Currently, Boston permits one internal ADU in all 1-, 2-, and 3-family homes, but building an attached or detached ADU requires a zoning variance from the City's Zoning Board of Appeal, which adds costs and red tape, and undermines the benefit of creating affordable homes; *and*

WHEREAS, Boston's current restrictive zoning for ADUs has led to only 150 ADUs having been built in Boston from 2019 to May 2024; *and*

WHEREAS, The right to build an ADU is often essential for families to have space to care for aging family members, provide increased privacy to young adults seeking independent living while living with family, or for other intergenerational living arrangements; *and*

WHEREAS, ADUs are further utilized by those seeking additional income through renting, those downsizing who wish to remain on their property, tenants seeking a more affordable option than traditional housing, and many others whose personal circumstances lead them to believe an ADU would best meet their needs; *and*

WHEREAS, The appeal of ADUs is widespread: the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that one in four homeowners 50 years or older would consider building one on their property, their main motivators being the accommodation of a loved one who needs care (55%) or providing a home for family members or friends (52%); *and*

WHEREAS, ADUs offer a low-cost alternative to costly assisted-living facilities and allow elderly residents to age in-place; many of Boston's 82,000 elderly residents may benefit from the opportunity to receive at-home support from family members, as 20.9% of Bostonians 65 years of age or older had an income below the poverty line, 12.5% reported self-care difficulty, and 19.7% reported independent living difficulty according to the 2025 MA Healthy Aging Community Profile; *and*

WHEREAS, The cost of living in Boston is significantly higher than the national average, and Boston and the surrounding region have a shortage of tens of thousands of homes to meet the needs of existing residents, and as small and affordable units, ADUs can help to meet the need for more affordable housing options and reduce the percentage of residents who are housing cost-burdened; *and*

WHEREAS, The City of Boston can serve a role in reducing the costs and complexity for residents to build ADUs by providing sample architectural plans and technical guidance, as exemplified by the Accessory Dwelling Unit Guidebook that the City's Planning Department has already created, which offers twelve sample ADU floor plan designs tailored to meet space and capacity needs; *and*

WHEREAS, Boston's housing affordability crisis is urgent, and ADUs can enable more residents to live with dignity; our communities should have an opportunity to engage in this discussion as Boston rectifies the discrepancies between our City zoning and the other 350 municipalities in Massachusetts.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing to explore legalizing Accessory Dwelling Units by-right in every neighborhood in the City of Boston. Representatives from the Boston Planning Department and Mayor's Office of Housing will be invited, along with community advocates, and members of the public are encouraged to attend and testify.

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