

Manatee County Loosens ADU Regulations

Definitions

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) shall mean an attached or detached residential dwelling unit, with cooking and bathroom facilities, which is subordinate and separate from the primary dwelling unit.

Obscure Glass shall mean glass with reduced transparency, that distorts the view from both sides, revealing only silhouettes (i.e. frosted glass).

Credit: The Bradenton Times

Posted: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 5:33 pm

By: Dawn Kitterman

BRADENTON — Manatee County has officially adopted revised regulations for issuing building permits for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The new rules eliminate the 750-foot size cap and end the blanket restriction on the number of subordinate units.

The change comes after the Director of Development Services issued an [administrative determination memo](#) in December 2023 to the county zoning official and planning division managers, creating an exception to the existing code requirements for ADU permit approvals.

The determination memo cited in part “conflicting requirements” within county land development codes that led to “practical difficulty and unnecessary hardship” for some ADU permit applicants.

The departmental memo instructed staff to temporarily address “conflicting requirements” by “allowing construction of ADUs up to 80% of the size of the principal structure at the discretion of the director.”

At the time, existing code restricted ADU construction to a maximum of 750 square feet on most properties in the county, with properties zoned A or A-1 (Agricultural) up to 1,000 square feet.

Staff provided commissioners with a presentation on the proposed changes during a December 2024 BOCC meeting, laying out the need to permanently modify the existing ADU code.

During the presentation, county staff explained that since the issuance of the administrative memo in 2023, the county had issued building permits for five ADUs that exceeded the 750-foot rule.

This week, county commissioners officially [approved staff's proposed revisions](#), bringing county ADU rules in line with the administrative directive issued in Dec. 2023.

Residential properties under county jurisdiction may now be issued permits for the construction of ADUs that are up to 80% of the primary home’s size. This means that for the average 1,500-square-foot primary residence, a property owner could apply for—and receive—a permit to construct an ADU of up to 1,200 square feet.

However, the changes to the ADU rules do not eliminate setback requirements or change existing building codes related to construction standards or inspection requirements.

The changes adopted on Tuesday also impact the number of Accessory Dwelling Units that may be constructed on a property.

Under prior regulations, a conforming property was permitted to have either one guest house or one ADU—but not both, and not more than one of either.

Provisions now allow larger parcels to be approved for the construction of multiple units.

Prior regulations still apply for lots less than five acres—one ADU or one guest house. However, for conforming lots of five acres or more (but less than 20 acres), these property owners will now be permitted a maximum of two subordinate structures. The change means that parcels that are five acres or larger may be permitted for the construction of one ADU and one guest house, or two ADUs or two guest houses.

The restrictions on the number of subordinate structures get even more lax for parcels that exceed 20 acres. Properties of this size will now be limited to a maximum of three subordinate residential structures which can be any combination of ADUs and/or guest houses.

The main difference between a guest house and an ADU is that guest houses by county definition do not include an operational kitchen (oven/stove), whereas an ADU does. ADUs are intended for full-time living (a house or apartment that shares the building lot of a primary home), whereas guest houses are intended for temporary boarding.

Manatee County first enacted ADU building code regulation, contained in Section 511.18 of the Land Development Code, in 2021.

To view a redline document showing the adopted changes to Manatee County's ADU guidelines, [click here](#).