

# **Allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) in Patton Township Report**

Elliott Killian

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## Executive Summary

Patton Township, like much of Centre County, is experiencing rising housing costs, limited availability of affordable options, and increasing demand from workers, families, and students. As the community grows, the Township must adopt proactive solutions that expand housing opportunities while preserving the character of its neighborhoods. Allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) is one of the most effective and least disruptive ways to meet this challenge.

ADUs—also known as granny flats, in-law suites, or backyard cottages—are small, self-contained housing units located on the same lot as a primary residence. They offer a flexible way to increase the housing supply, support multi-generational living, and provide new income opportunities for homeowners. ADUs are especially well-suited to Patton Township, where many lots are already sized to accommodate this type of modest, low-impact growth.

This report proposes a zoning amendment that would allow one ADU per residential property in all zoning districts, with design guidelines and green infrastructure requirements that maintain neighborhood integrity and environmental standards. A two-track approval process is recommended: standard ADUs that meet pre-set guidelines could be approved by township staff, while non-standard proposals would be reviewed by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

Importantly, this proposal reframes development as a benefit to residents—not a burden. By giving homeowners the right to improve their properties and meet their family or financial needs, the Township can transform the typical "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) reaction into a "Yes My Yard" (YMY) approach—empowering individuals while addressing the broader housing crisis.

ADUs represent a smart, scalable, and resident-centered solution—one that advances affordability, economic resilience, sustainability, and homeowner empowerment without sacrificing community character.

## The Need for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

### The Need for More Housing

Patton Township, like much of Centre County, is experiencing increasing pressure on its housing market. With the continued growth of Penn State University, expansions in local healthcare and education employment, and an aging population, demand for housing continues to outpace supply. Young professionals, essential workers, and retirees all face challenges finding housing that is both affordable and close to work or services.

Recent data shows that the average rent in Centre County is over \$2,000 per month, while the median household income lags behind state and national averages. As a result, many residents are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing. These pressures contribute to longer commutes, reduced quality of life, and difficulty attracting and retaining workers.

ADUs offer a flexible, low-impact way to address this shortage. Unlike large apartment complexes or major rezoning initiatives, ADUs allow for small-scale, incremental housing growth within existing neighborhoods. Homeowners can add a unit for a relative, a tenant, or as a retirement income source—all without changing the character of the neighborhood.

### ADUs as a Strategic Response to NIMBY

The most common barrier to new housing is not infrastructure or finances—it is fear. NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) sentiment is a human reaction rooted in fear of change and concern for personal property values. However, when change brings direct benefit, resistance often fades.

ADUs flip the traditional development model: instead of imposing change from the outside, they invite residents to be *participants* in growth. Homeowners decide whether to build an ADU, reaping the financial rewards and increasing the value of their property. The change is not "in their backyard"—it is their backyard, on their terms.

This approach represents a shift toward called **“Yes My Yard” (YMY)** zoning—where residents are empowered, not displaced, by zoning reform. ADUs provide a way for individuals to adapt their own properties for changing family needs, aging in place, or generating rental income. This personal stake reframes housing growth not as a threat, but as an opportunity.

## Personal Stories Illustrate the Gap

A local example shared by the Patton Township Housing Task Force highlights the urgency of this issue. A young teacher employed in the State College School District—one of the largest employers in the region—was living in a shared rental because private housing was unaffordable. An ADU could have provided this teacher with a modest, private home within biking distance to work. Similar challenges face healthcare professionals at Mount Nittany Medical Center and Geisinger Clinic, who often carry student loan burdens and struggle to meet current housing costs.

By allowing ADUs, Patton Township can retain the workers who make the community function—teachers, nurses, public servants—by giving them options for safe, stable, and local housing.

## Conclusion of the Need for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

The need for housing in Patton Township is real, growing, and deeply interconnected with the economic and social fabric of the community. ADUs offer a practical, flexible solution that respects neighborhood character while unlocking new opportunities. By embracing ADUs, Patton Township can take a proactive step toward meeting its housing challenges with a tool that empowers, not divides, its residents.

## Understanding ADUs: What Is Being Proposed

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are a proven and adaptable housing solution that allow homeowners to create small, independent living spaces on their existing residential properties. This section outlines what ADUs are, how they work, and how they would be implemented in Patton Township.

### What Is an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)?

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is a smaller, secondary housing unit located on the same lot as a primary residence. Commonly referred to as granny flats, in-law suites, backyard cottages, garage apartments, or carriage houses, ADUs are self-contained homes with their own kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping area.

ADUs come in several forms:

- **Detached ADU:** A standalone structure separate from the main house (e.g., a small cottage in the backyard).

- **Attached ADU:** A new addition attached to the primary home.
- **Interior ADU:** A converted basement, attic, or portion of the existing house.
- **Above-Garage ADU:** A unit built above a garage or within a garage conversion.

These flexible housing forms allow property owners to adapt to life-stage changes, accommodate extended family, or generate rental income—while preserving the look and feel of residential neighborhoods.

## Where Would ADUs Be Allowed?

To provide the most benefit while maintaining fairness across the township, ADUs would be permitted in all residential zoning districts—including R1, R2, and R3. This ensures that all homeowners, regardless of district, have the opportunity to improve their property and participate in solutions to the housing shortage.

Allowing ADUs township-wide reinforces equity in housing policy, avoids overburdening specific neighborhoods, and distributes gentle density evenly.

## Size, Height, and Design Guidelines

To ensure ADUs blend seamlessly with existing homes, the following design standards are proposed:

- **Maximum Height:** ADUs must conform to the **same height restrictions** as the primary dwelling, as defined by the zoning district. This keeps the scale of structures consistent with neighborhood expectations.
- **Setbacks:** Patton Township may choose to **standardize side yard setbacks**, making regulations easier to understand and apply across property types.
- **Architectural Design:** Patton Township could adopt **additional design guidelines** to preserve neighborhood character—such as requiring ADUs to match the materials, colors, or rooflines of the main home.

These standards will ensure that ADUs remain a subtle addition to the community fabric, rather than a source of disruption.

## One ADU per Property

To prevent overdevelopment in low-density residential areas, this proposal includes a **clear and fair limitation**:

- **Only one ADU would be allowed per property.**
- **For lots larger than one acre, still only one ADU would be allowed per acre.**
- **For lots under one acre, one ADU would still be permitted.**

This rule balances flexibility for homeowners with protection against apartment-style density in single-family neighborhoods. The goal is to provide more housing without fundamentally changing the community's look and feel.

## Summary of What's Being Proposed

- ADUs include detached units, interior conversions, or garage apartments.
- Allowed in all residential zones: R1, R2, and R3.
- One ADU allowed per property, with a cap of one per acre.
- Height limits match the primary structure's zoning.
- Township may add design guidelines and standardized setbacks.

This proposal empowers residents to adapt their homes for the future while maintaining the qualities that make Patton Township a desirable place to live.

## How ADUs Would Work in Patton Township

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) can be integrated into Patton Township's existing planning processes in a way that upholds high standards of review while streamlining the experience for homeowners. This section outlines a proposed framework for zoning, permitting, design standards, stormwater compliance, and inspections.

## Zoning and Permitting Process

ADUs would be permitted in all residential zoning districts (R1, R2, and R3), with clear rules to ensure consistency and avoid misuse.

To maintain Patton Township's tradition of thoughtful planning, but without enabling NIMBY-style obstruction, a two-track permitting process is recommended:

### Track 1: Standard ADUs (Administrative Approval)

- If a proposed ADU meets all standard design, size, and stormwater guidelines, it would be approved administratively by staff—no need for Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors review.
- This removes unnecessary delays and avoids politicizing private property decisions while ensuring compliance with clear, pre-set rules.

### Track 2: Non-Standard ADUs (Reviewed Approval)

- If a proposed ADU requires a stormwater variance, special materials, unusual placement, or exceeds standard limits, it would be reviewed by the Planning Commission and then the Board of Supervisors.
- This process ensures public oversight and community alignment for exceptional cases, while preserving transparency and public trust.

By focusing reviews only on non-standard cases, the Township avoids using its review process as a gatekeeping mechanism and instead reinforces fair access and predictable outcomes.

## Design and Placement Standards

To ensure ADUs fit within existing neighborhood character, proposed standards include:

- **Height:** Same maximum height as allowed for the primary residence.
- **Setbacks:** Use of standardized side-yard setbacks, making regulations more predictable and easier to follow for property owners. This means all side-yard setbacks would be the same size regardless of lot size, increasing area on a lot that can be built.
- **Lot Coverage:** Increase building coverage so that it is the same as impervious coverage. Allow for building and impervious coverage to increase if green infrastructure solutions are implemented (see below) to address stormwater.

These design standards maintain the look and feel of neighborhoods while enabling sensible, small-scale growth.

## **Stormwater Requirements and Green Infrastructure Incentives**

Increased building coverage can raise concerns about runoff and drainage. To address this, ADU construction would be tied to modern stormwater management practices:

Homeowners who wish to exceed standard lot coverage could do so only by adopting green infrastructure, such as: Rain gardens, Storage tanks, Green roofs, Permeable paving systems

This encourages environmental responsibility and protects the Township's infrastructure—without restricting homeowner flexibility.

## **Summary: A Balanced Approach**

- **Standard ADUs:** Reviewed and approved by staff if they meet pre-established criteria—fast, fair, and transparent.
- **Non-Standard ADUs:** Reviewed by Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors—ensures oversight for exceptions.
- **Design and setbacks:** Clear and standardized, matching existing zoning where possible.
- **Stormwater solutions:** Encourage green infrastructure while offering flexibility.

This balanced approach preserves Patton Township's careful planning ethos while streamlining opportunities for homeowners and protecting neighborhoods from ad hoc decision-making or NIMBY interference.



## Addressing Concerns & Framing the Change

Implementing zoning reforms often leads to community resistance, especially when it touches residential neighborhoods. However, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) provide a unique opportunity to frame change as a benefit to existing homeowners—not a threat. This section addresses common concerns and offers a compelling alternative perspective rooted in fairness, property rights, and personal empowerment.

### Understanding NIMBY: Fear, Control, and Self-Interest

The opposition to new housing—often referred to as NIMBY (Not In My Backyard)—is not necessarily rooted in bad intentions. It is a human response to fear and uncertainty. People fear that new development will decrease their property values, disrupt neighborhood character, or add traffic and noise. Beneath these concerns is often a deeper belief: if change is happening nearby, I should benefit—or at least not be harmed.

When residents don't see a personal benefit, they may use political pressure to block the change, even when it would serve the broader community. This dynamic can paralyze progress and worsen housing shortages.

### ADUs as the Antidote to NIMBY

ADUs turn this dynamic on its head. Instead of asking residents to accept change for someone else's benefit, they are invited to participate in and benefit from the change themselves:

- Homeowners choose whether to build an ADU—it's entirely voluntary.
- They benefit directly, whether through rental income, multigenerational living, or increased property value.
- The property remains in their control, not subject to outside development.

By design, ADUs don't threaten neighborhood stability—they reinforce it by allowing families to stay together, helping seniors age in place, and supporting responsible, small-scale growth.

### “Yes My Yard”: A New Framing

Instead of “Not In My Backyard,” this proposal embraces a new philosophy: **“Yes My Yard” (YMY)**. YMY is about giving homeowners the right and tools to improve their own property to meet their changing needs.

This framing recognizes:

- ADU construction is a homeowner's right, not a privilege to be granted by others.
- That right should not be subject to neighbor veto, especially when the project meets clear and fair township rules.
- Change is accepted more readily when people can guide and gain from it.

By shifting the conversation from fear to empowerment, YMY helps reduce opposition while promoting community-focused solutions.

## **Rules That Preserve Neighborhood Character**

To address concerns about overdevelopment or unwanted change, the ADU proposal includes clear, enforceable rules that preserve the single-family feel of residential neighborhoods:

- Only one ADU per property, with a cap of one per acre.
- ADU must match the scale and design limits of the existing primary residence (height, setbacks, lot coverage).
- ADUs do not allow for multi-family development, avoiding the conversion of neighborhoods into apartment zones.

These limits ensure that growth happens incrementally, predictably, and with sensitivity to existing neighborhood patterns.

## **Homeowner Rights and Community Benefit**

ADUs offer personal and community-level benefits that few other housing solutions can match:

- Homeowners gain flexibility, income, and long-term security.
- Families can support aging parents or adult children with dignity and privacy.
- Property values often increase due to the added livable space.
- The Township gains more diverse housing options without major development.

When residents see that the change benefits them, not just someone else, they are more likely to support it—or even lead the way.

## Summary of Addressing Concerns & Framing the Change

Patton Township has the opportunity to lead with a policy that reflects fairness, freedom, and flexibility. By recognizing ADU development as a **right of homeowners**, and implementing safeguards that maintain neighborhood integrity, the Township can overcome fear-driven opposition and support thoughtful, inclusive growth.

This is not just about zoning. It's about trusting residents to improve their communities—starting with their own backyards.

## Benefits of Allowing ADUs

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) provide a smart, flexible housing solution that meets the needs of homeowners, neighborhoods, and the wider Patton Township community. ADUs offer a range of benefits without requiring disruptive or large-scale redevelopment. This section outlines the key advantages of adopting an ADU ordinance.

### Increases Affordable Housing Without Large-Scale Change

One of the most pressing challenges facing Patton Township is the shortage of affordable housing options. ADUs offer a gentle way to add housing—one unit at a time—within existing neighborhoods. They:

- Help ease pressure on the rental market.
- Offer naturally affordable housing options (due to smaller size and scale).
- Allow workers and young professionals to live closer to jobs, reducing long commutes.

Unlike major developments, ADUs can be added incrementally and voluntarily by homeowners, preserving neighborhood character while expanding housing options.

### Provides Income Opportunities for Homeowners

ADUs give property owners a flexible financial tool. Homeowners can:

- Earn passive rental income to help offset mortgages or retirement expenses.
- Build equity through an added, usable structure.
- Improve their property's resale value by increasing livable space.

This is particularly helpful for seniors on fixed incomes or young families looking to stabilize their finances while staying in the community.

## **Supports Aging in Place and Multi-Generational Living**

As families grow and age, housing needs change. ADUs provide options for:

- Seniors to age in place, either in the ADU or by moving into a smaller unit and renting out their main home.
- Families to house adult children or relatives without overcrowding.
- Caregivers or extended family to live close by, enhancing support systems.

This flexibility promotes stronger families, deeper community ties, and healthier aging—all within a walkable, familiar setting.

## **Boosts the Local Economy and Expands the Tax Base**

Allowing ADUs helps:

- Bring in new residents who contribute to the local economy, shop locally, and use township services.
- Increase property values, especially on lots with added functional living space.
- Grow the tax base without needing new roads, water systems, or schools.

More households mean more local spending, more stable property tax revenue, and a more resilient township economy.

## **Aligns With Land-Use, Mobility, and Anti-Sprawl Goals**

ADUs support smart land use by:

- Encouraging infill development instead of suburban sprawl.
- Placing new housing closer to transit, bike routes, and job centers.
- Reducing the environmental footprint of housing by maximizing existing infrastructure.

By prioritizing walkable, mixed-use, and low-impact development, ADUs contribute to Patton Township's long-term sustainability and planning goals.

## **Summary of Benefits of Allowing ADUs**

ADUs are a win-win solution: they provide homeowners with new options and income, expand housing availability for workers and families, and support the township's broader goals for growth, sustainability, and equity. By allowing ADUs, Patton Township can make meaningful progress toward addressing its housing challenges without compromising the values and character that make the community strong.

## **What Patton Township Needs to Decide**

Should building coverage be the same as impervious coverage in residential zones?

Should stormwater and green infrastructure be allowed to increase building and impervious coverage in residential zones?

Should side-yard setbacks be reduced and standardized?

Should ADUs height limit be the same as the primary structure on the lot?

Should there be a standard and non-standard approval processes for ADUs?

How should Patton Township prevent the NIMBY reaction from derailing ADU adoption?

## **Conclusion**

Patton Township faces a clear and urgent challenge: how to provide more housing options in a way that respects the character of its neighborhoods, supports current residents, and prepares for a sustainable future. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) offer a practical, flexible, and low-impact solution that meets all these goals.

### **A High-Benefit, Low-Impact Housing Solution**

ADUs are uniquely positioned to address the township's housing shortage without requiring large-scale development. They:

- Fit within the existing residential footprint.
- Are homeowner-driven, not developer-driven.
- Create meaningful housing opportunities while preserving the look and feel of neighborhoods.

Few housing strategies offer such a strong return with such minimal disruption.

### **Preserving Neighborhoods, Empowering Homeowners**

This proposal is built on a simple but powerful principle: change should benefit the people who already live here. ADUs do just that. They offer financial and lifestyle flexibility to homeowners while helping the community meet growing housing needs.

ADUs do not turn neighborhoods into apartment zones. Instead, they allow for gradual, respectful growth—one yard at a time—by giving residents control over how their property evolves. They protect neighborhood character while expanding community capacity.

### **Smart Growth Through Local Empowerment**

Adopting a clear and fair ADU policy is a proactive step that:

- Empowers residents with more choices.
- Expands housing for workers, families, and retirees.
- Aligns with Patton Township's land-use, equity, and economic goals.

It's not just a housing solution—it's a community investment rooted in fairness, flexibility, and the long-term health of the township.