

Portsmouth's New ADU Rules: What Homeowners Should Know

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) — sometimes called in-law apartments or backyard cottages — are now easier to build in Portsmouth. The city has updated its zoning rules to align with new state laws designed to help homeowners create more housing while keeping neighborhoods intact.

What's Changed

- Detached ADUs now allowed citywide — not just attached or within existing homes.
- No longer limited to family use — units can be rented to anyone.
- Simpler approvals — ADUs that meet basic zoning standards can be built by right, without needing a special exception.
- Minimum lot size flexibility — smaller lots can now qualify if setbacks and other standards are met.
- Parking rules relaxed — the city can't require more than one parking space for an ADU.
- Owner occupancy no longer required — you don't have to live on the property to rent the unit.

Why It Matters

New Hampshire's housing shortage is affecting everyone — families, seniors, and local workers. ADUs are a small but powerful way to add homes that fit the character of existing neighborhoods.

- Income for homeowners
- Independent space for aging parents or young adults
- More affordable rental options in the city

Getting Started

1. Review the city's ADU application guide at portsmouthnh.gov/planning
2. Talk with a local architect or builder about design and code compliance
3. Check whether your lot meets basic size and utility access requirements

The Bottom Line

Portsmouth's new ADU rules give homeowners flexibility to help address the city's housing crunch — and make better use of space they already own.

Based on 2025 zoning amendments and state legislation HB 631 / HB 633. | Progress Portsmouth • progressportsmouth.com