



Coalition for Smarter Growth
DC • MD • VA

January 5, 2021

Planning Commission
City of Alexandria
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

RE: Support for Accessory Dwelling Units in Alexandria

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG), the leading organization in the DC region advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. CSG appreciates the City of Alexandria's efforts to develop an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) policy and writes to convey our full support of the proposal. CSG has become a leading expert on ADUs through our work in DC and our just-released [DC ADU homeowners manual](#).

Accessory dwelling units can offer less expensive housing options than renting or buying a single-family home because of their smaller size. They are great for an aging parent you are caring for, offer a home for your recent college graduate, or a young professional just starting their career. ADUs can also offer a stream of income for homeowners, including lower-income homeowners and retirees on fixed incomes.

CSG is enthusiastic about the strong provisions being proposed that will help make the City's program a success, such as allowing ADUs citywide, not requiring off-street parking requirements for the ADU in our transit-rich city, and the no-fee application process.

We are concerned however about any owner-occupancy requirement. This requirement lacks flexibility for the homeowner and may limit one's ability to build an ADU. An owner-occupancy requirement could make it difficult for homeowners to finance accessory dwelling units. This may serve to exacerbate income and racial inequities by limiting the ability of homeowners to construct ADUs to those with sufficient equity in their homes.

An owner-occupancy requirement would also be limiting to people who must move on short notice, such as military and diplomatic families, who often choose to rent out their primary residence. We also note that single-family homes today are already frequently rented out by

owners who are not living on site. The owner-occupancy requirement would be a barrier to constructing ADUs and undermine the goal of increasing the supply of ADUs in the city.

We encourage the city to establish a timeframe of a few years and require that staff review the new policy and make recommendations to address impacts to the success of the program. This could include creating an affordability program for low-income renters or buyers, assessing size limitations and setbacks and their impact, whether or not the program has exacerbated or improved racial and income inequalities, and recommendations to address any other barriers towards creating new housing through ADUs.

While future tweaks to the program may be necessary, CSG believes the proposed ADU policy is a bold step forward in establishing a strong program that will help provide more housing options in Alexandria. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sonya Breehey
Northern Virginia Advocacy Manager
Coalition for Smarter Growth