YIMBY LAW

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California ADUs: Permit Purgatory

The Ten Hardest Places to Build ADUs in California

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Green Development Company

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Executive Summary

California has successfully made Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) a major part of its housing strategy, now accounting for over one-fifth of new homes. ADUs provide lower-cost, infill housing, and economic benefits to homeowners. However, despite legislative reforms to streamline approvals, local implementation and obstruction remain the primary barriers to building ADUs.

This report shows that in the ten slowest jurisdictions, entitlement and permitting timelines far exceed the 60-day ministerial review intended by state law, sometimes taking multiple years.

Top Ten Localities with the Longest Average ADU Permitting Process

Locality	Avg. Number of Days between Submitted and Permitted	Percent Above the Statewide Avg. (258.17 days)	Percent Above the 60-day Ministerial Review Timeline
San Francisco	731	183.2%	1118.6%
Santa Barbara	619	139.9%	932.3%
San Gabriel	577	123.3%	861.1%
Oxnard	489	89.4%	715.1%
Los Altos Hills	473	83.3%	688.7%
La Canada Flintridge	472	83%	687.4%
Half Moon Bay	459	77.9%	665.4%
Beverly Hills	445	72.5%	642.3%
Folsom	436	68.6%	625.8%
Monterey County	419	62.3%	598.3%

These delays are caused by an unpredictable system created by restrictive local ordinances, inconsistent standards, departmental miscommunication, Coastal Zone regulations, and dysfunctional processes. Such inconsistency undermines state goals, slows housing production, inflates costs, and harms homeowners who lack the legal and financial resources of professional developers.

To realize the full potential of ADUs, jurisdictions must ensure clear, compliant, and predictable implementation. Clarifying ordinances, improving cross-departmental coordination, modernizing workflows, and enhancing applicant support are necessary to uphold state law and accelerate housing delivery.

California has set the path for widespread ADU production; the next step requires local practice to align with legislative intent. By adopting best practices and eliminating barriers, cities and counties can make ADU development a reliable, scalable tool for expanding housing supply. Consistent statewide alignment will establish ADUs as an effective, equitable solution to the housing shortage.

Introduction

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are crucial to solving California's housing shortage because they offer a cost-effective and innovative option for affordable housing construction. As a key infill development strategy, ADUs add additional housing units to underutilized lots and increase available housing stock without the need for additional land or major infrastructure upgrades. ADUs also provide direct benefits to homeowners, including an additional source of income and greater flexibility with family living arrangements for young people just entering the workforce and older individuals who want to age in place. In addition, ADUs located near transit and without parking requirements provide easy access to jobs and other amenities, reducing reliance on motor vehicles. With all of these benefits, it is no surprise that in 2024, 26.6% of all homes permitted in California were ADUs[1], and the number of ADUs permitted annually rose from 1,336 to 30,354 between 2016 and 2024[2].

The rise in ADU construction can be credited to a decade of improvements to California housing laws. Since 2016, California has passed numerous laws to make ADUs easier and less expensive to build. SB 1069 reduces barriers to ADU construction by streamlining the permitting process and limiting the requirements that cities and municipalities can impose. Subsequently, AB 2299 works in conjunction with SB 1069 by requiring local governments to adopt ordinances consistent with the state's ADU regulations, providing uniformity and compliance across municipalities, and mandating approval of ADUs in residential and mixed-use zones.

[1] California Department of Housing and Community Development. (January 2026). *Accessory Dwelling Unit Handbook*. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/sites/default/files/docs/policy-and-research/adu-handbook-update.pdf

[2] California Department of Housing and Community Development. (January 2026). *Accessory Dwelling Unit Handbook*. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/sites/default/files/docs/policy-and-research/adu-handbook-update.pdf

Building upon this success, from 2019 to 2025 additional reforms have encouraged greater ADU development:

- AB 68 (2019) and AB 881 (2019) simplify the approval process by removing minimum lot size and setback requirements and reducing parking requirements, among other things.
- AB 670 (2019) invalidates any deed restriction or covenant that prohibits or unreasonably restricts the construction of ADUs on single-family residential lots.
- AB 671 (2019) requires local governments to include plans to incentivize and promote the creation of ADUs in their housing elements.
- SB 13 (2020) requires local agencies to approve or deny an ADU permit application **within 60 days** of receipt of a completed application.
- SB 9 (2021) requires ministerial approval of a housing development with "no more than two primary units" in a single-family zone. The law allows for the creation of up to four housing units in the lot area typically used for one single-family home.
- AB 2221 (2022) clarifies the ADU approval process and addresses ambiguities in previous legislation, making it easier to build ADUs in unused commercial space, in "missing middle" housing, and in existing single-family homes.
- SB 897 (2022) specifies that certain standards imposed on ADUs must be objective.
- SB 1211 (2024) increases the number of permitted detached ADUs on a multifamily lot anywhere from two up to eight, depending on the existing number of units on the site. The law also prohibits local governments from requiring the replacement of surface parking spaces when existing parking is repurposed for ADUs.
- SB 9 (2025) authorizes HCD to void any local ADU ordinances that violate state law, and allows state ADU standards to be applied until the local government remedies local violations.
- SB 543 mandates that "a permitting agency shall determine whether an application to create or serve an accessory dwelling unit is complete and provide written notice

of this determination to the applicant not later than 15 business days after the permitting agency received the application." If the permitting agency determines an application to be incomplete, it must "provide the applicant with a list of incomplete items and a description of how the application can be made complete. The list and description shall be provided with the written notice [required within 15 days]," and resubmitted applications must be reviewed for completeness within 15 business days.

However, despite state legislation barring local governments from imposing certain restrictions, certain cities and counties continue to hamper ADU growth in California. According to the University of California Berkeley Center for Community Innovation's *"ADU Research 2019-2021*," 50% of homeowners had difficulty receiving an ADU permit, citing issues with the local approval process, design constraints or challenges, and the cost of construction. Moreover, the current process of designing, entitling, and permitting an ADU varies greatly depending on the jurisdiction.

For example, the statewide average number of days between an ADU project submission and permit approval is 258 days, but many jurisdictions that average longer entitlement processes, with San Francisco taking the lead at 731 days between submission and permit approval. While state legislation requires all cities to approve ADUs through a ministerial process (reviewing based on objective standards), an ADU that is permitted by one jurisdiction could still be delayed or denied by another. As a result, this inconsistency, not only between jurisdictions but also between local governments and state legislation, undermines the intent of state legislation and hinders progress towards achieving the state's housing goals. By impeding ADU approval, local jurisdictions delay the construction of much needed housing and defy the state's ADU laws.

In this report, YIMBY Law identifies the ten worst localities to build an ADU in California, based on the time it takes for a project to move from the "Submission" phase to the "Permitted" phase. We then compare the locality's ADU ordinances to state ADU legislation to illustrate how local laws in these locations deter or discourage ADU production. After documenting the state's worst ADU offenders, we provide recommendations for "best practices" for local approval processes and ordinances that will encourage ADU production.

Methodology

HCD's Housing Element Implementation and APR Data Dashboard is the best source for determining which localities are the slowest to approve ADU projects. The Dashboard uses localities' Annual Progress Reports to generate a Housing Development Timeline that indicates the average number of days needed for each part of the development cycle: **Submitted to Entitled**, **Entitled to Permitted**, and **Permitted to Completed.**[3] Within these categories, we filter for 'Accessory Dwelling Units' through **Structure Type** and focus on the portion showing **Average Days by Jurisdiction (minimum of ten projects)**. There we find the top ten jurisdictions with the longest average entitlement time for ADUs.

In this report, we focus on the **Submitted to Entitled** and the **Entitled to Permitted** stages of development, where applicants often face significant roadblocks. The entitlement process tends to be more complicated than the permitting process and is often subject to staff interpretation, leading to inconsistent application of the law and confusion among applicants. To be "entitled," the local agency has to approve an entity to develop a building for a specific use, and approval decisions depend on the structure's intended use, conformity to city zoning and plans, and the design of the proposed structure. Whether a project's design lines up with city plans and zoning requirements tends to be more contentious and subjective, even when meant to be reviewed using objective standards. With varying standards between jurisdictions, the road to entitlement becomes more unpredictable. This contrasts with the more technically straightforward "permitting" process, which involves ensuring that construction complies with health, safety, and building code standards. However, ADUs must be approved through a ministerial review process, so the time between submission and permitting is also important to analyze. Thus, this report focuses on the delays encountered at the **Submitted to Entitled** and **Entitled to Permitted** development stages.

Because HCD's APR Dashboard separates the construction process into three phases, the APR data does not provide specific data for the average number of days between an ADU application being **submitted** and being **permitted**. Therefore, we combined the averages

[3] On the HCD Housing Element Implementation and APR Dashboard, "completed" refers to a constructed building that has received a certificate of occupancy.

of both the **Submitted to Entitled** and the **Entitled to Permitted** phases from **2020 to 2025** to determine which localities averaged in the top ten of days between submission and permitting.

Some barriers to ADUs may not show in this data. There are localities that hinder the permitting process by simply refusing to move on a project, preventing the project from becoming entitled at all. This can happen directly, for example, by refusing to process the application or indirectly, by delaying the project for so long it becomes financially infeasible. As a result, we acknowledge that these numbers do not tell the full story, nevertheless this assessment should still be seen as an accurate review of ADU construction hurdles in California.

Findings

As previously outlined, California has passed a series of laws since 2016 meant to improve and streamline the process to build accessory dwellings units, but the reality on the ground can be very challenging for homeowners and builders. ADU construction has expanded dramatically and has been publicly branded as a more **affordable** solution for easing the housing shortage. Yet the process is often much lengthier and more complex than public messaging depicts. Project permitting and, ultimately, project completions, routinely encounter lengthy delays that place unnecessary financial burdens on builders through increased costs, extended project timelines, strained relationships with clients, and possible legal proceedings. Average construction costs range from $150,000 to $350,000, depending on the scope of the project,[4] and unnecessary delays only push costs higher. Beyond cost impediments, builders and homeowners must still contend with local governments imposing confusing and often arbitrary restrictions that vary considerably based on the jurisdiction. While some localities have ordinances that encourage ADU development, others set up barriers around project design, such as height, lot coverage,

[4] Gura, O. (2025, October). *The Average Cost of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in California – How much does it really cost?* LA Family Builders. Retrieved from https://lafamilybuilders.com/the-average-cost-of-adu/

fire access, privacy requirements, etc. This variability results in most ADU processing times extending beyond the statute's 60-day review period. Below, readers will find the ten local governments most frequently in violation of the 60-day approval timeline, based on data from HCD's Housing Element and APR Dashboard.

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Comparing City Ordinances to State ADU Law Requirements

State ADU law provides the minimum statutory requirements (see Appendix One for State Requirements) for ADUs and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units (JADUs). Local governments can and are encouraged to go beyond these minimum requirements. While most ADU ordinances in the ten localities identified above were compliant with state law, some of these localities create ambiguity and inconsistency in the application process by overregulating development standards and enforcing (rather than waiving) parking requirements. This lack of clarity inevitably results in delays and increased financial risk for project applicants.

Local Development Standards

Local development standards impact the viability of ADU projects as they would any other development; however, most ADU applicants are not traditional property developers and often lack the necessary expertise or financial resources to navigate complex requirements. As such, it is even more important that local standards allow for a straightforward, streamlined process that encourages local ADU development. Following the passing of various state laws governing ADUs in 2025, localities such as Oxnard, Folsom, and Monterey County have updated their local ADU ordinances to better comply with state law, while others like Santa Barbara are in the process of evaluating and updating their local ADU ordinances for both compliance and clarity.

Below is a chart comparing the local development standards of the top ten localities with the longest average ADU permitting process and indicating which localities are employing more restrictive and less restrictive rules than required by state law.

		San Francisco	Santa Barbara	San Gabriel	Oxnard	Los Altos Hills	La Canada Flintridge	Half Moon Bay	Beverly Hills	Folsom	Monterey County
Minimum Size	Attached ADU	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
	Detached ADU	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
Maximum Size	Attached ADU	=	=	?	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
	Detached ADU	=	=	=	✓	=	=	=	=	=	=
Maximum Height	Attached ADU	=	=	=	=	=	=	✖	=	=	=
	Detached ADU	=	=	=	=	=	=	✖	=	=	=
Rear + Side Setbacks		=	=	=	=	✖	=	=	=	=	✖
Front Setbacks		=	=	?	=	✖	=	=	=	?	?

✓ **:** Less restrictive than state law
= : Complies with state law
✖ **:** More restrictive than state law
? = Unclear if compliant with state law

Setback Requirements

Under state law, localities are permitted to apply limited objective standards to ADU development. For example, a locality may require lot setbacks, but only up to four feet from the side and rear lot lines.[5] In addition, a locality can also impose front yard setback requirements, but only if they do not preclude an ADU of at least 800 square feet from being built on the property.[6] These allowances were one of the key reasons that setback requirements have become a hotbed of local ADU resistance, especially among the ten worst offenders identified in this report:

- Monterey County imposes more restrictive rules on ADUs in the Coastal Zone. In Monterey County, Coastal Zone ADUs must conform to all zoning and development standards, including setbacks, of the zoning district in which the lot is located.[7] Monterey County imposes a *minimum* rear and side setback of four feet when state law requires a *maximum* rear and side setback of four feet.
- Los Altos Hills requires a 40 foot front setback, which is twice what most cities generally impose. The town also set 4 foot *minimum* side and rear setbacks and incentivizes greater side and rear setbacks of at least 30 feet in exchange for additional floor area and building height.[8]
- San Gabriel requires detached ADUs to include a front setback determined by applicable zoning laws. The city places the burden on the applicant to show that the required front setback will prohibit the creation of at least an 800 square foot ADU.[9]

[5] Gov. Code §66314, subd. (d)(7).
[6] Gov. Code, § 66321, subd. (b)(3)
[7] Chapter 20.64.030: Regulations for accessory dwelling units. https://library.municode.com/ca/monterey_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT20COZO_CH20.64SPRE_20.64.030REACDWUN
[8] *Accessory Dwelling Units.* Los Altos Hills, California. https://www.losaltoshills.ca.gov/494/Accessory-Dwelling-Units
[9] § 153.047(N)(1). Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units (Junior ADU). https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/sangabriel/latest/sangabriel_ca/0-0-0-26154

- Folsom requires a front yard setback that "conforms to the front setback for the zone in which the [ADU] is located," but does not include the exception that allows for the construction of an ADU of at least 800 square feet.[10]

Minimum and Maximum Size Requirements

Establishing large minimum lot size requirements and/or small maximum size requirements for ADUs can restrict their potential development. Large minimum size requirements can prohibit homeowners with small and moderately sized lots from creating ADUs, while maximum size requirements may reduce the financial viability of an ADU by limiting its allowable size.

Most jurisdictions in this report impose minimum and maximum size requirements that align with state law, with the exception of San Gabriel. San Gabriel restricts attached ADUs to a maximum size of whichever is *less*:

- No more than 50% of the main dwelling size, or
- According to § 153.047(D), a maximum of 850 square feet for a studio or one-bedroom and a maximum of 1,000 square feet for a two-bedroom.[11]

But under state law, the City should allow for whichever is *greater* of the two.

Height Requirements

Under state law, local ADU ordinances must allow for the following height limits:

- Attached ADUs: up to 25 feet or the maximum allowed by underlying zoning, whichever is lower
- Detached ADUs: up to 16 feet, ***except:***

[10] 17.105.140(B). Single-unit developments–Attached accessory dwelling unit standards. https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Folsom/#!/Folsom17/Folsom17105.html
[11] Ordinance No. 706. (May 2024). *An Ordinance of the City Council of the City of San Gabriel, California Amending Title XV, Chapter 153 (Zoning) of the San Gabriel Municipal Code Regarding Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units.* https://www.sangabrielcity.com/DocumentCenter/View/22774/Ord-No-706

- Within ½ mile walking distance from transit: up to 18 feet plus 2 feet to accommodate a roof pitch
- On a lot with a multi-family, multi-story dwelling: up to 18 feet

Half Moon Bay caps the height of accessory dwelling units at 16 feet and does not provide for the exceptions allowed in state law,[12] which has been flagged by HCD as a violation of state law.[13]

Parking Requirements

Parking requirements often negatively impact the outcome of a project, especially smaller projects like ADUs, because of limitations on available land and funding. In fact, parking requirements are a well-established impediment to all types of development, resulting in less permitting and construction and higher housing costs overall.[14] Under Gov. Code § 66314, subd. (d)(10)(A), localities cannot require more than one parking space per unit or bedroom for an ADU, whichever is less. Moreover, ADUs are fully exempt from parking requirements if they meet one of the following criteria:

- Located within one-half mile walking distance of public transit
- Located within an architecturally and historically significant historic district
- Part of the proposed or existing primary residence or an accessory structure
- On-street parking permits are required but not offered to the occupant of the ADU
- There is a car share vehicle located within one block of the ADU
- A permit application for an ADU is submitted with a permit application to create a new single-family dwelling or a new multifamily dwelling on the same lot

Despite these exemptions, parking requirements in Coastal Zones continue to be a policy hurdle that affects ADU development. The California Coastal Commission does not

[12] Chapter 18.33 Accessory Dwelling Units. Half Moon Bay. https://ecode360.com/47035000
[13] McHarris, Steve (November 2024). *Review of Half Moon Bay's Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance under State ADU Law (Gov. Code, §§ 66310 - 66342)*. Department of Housing and Community Development. Retrieved from https://www.halfmoonbay.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7823/City_Response-Letter_04202026
[14] Garcia, D. and Tucker, J. (April 2021). *How AB 1401 May Impact Residential Parking Requirements.* Terner Center for Housing Innovation. Retrieved from https://ternercenter.berkeley.edu/research-and-policy/ab-1401-residential-parking-requirements/

automatically waive parking requirements, which forces ADU developers to account for off-street parking requirements in their applications.

In San Diego, ADUs are not required to have parking spaces if they are outside of the Coastal Overlay Zone.[15] However, if an ADU in the Coastal Overlay Zone is located within the Beach Impact Area of the Parking Impact Overlay Zone *and* outside of a transit priority area, the City will require one off-street parking space unless it meets certain exceptions. In addition, the City will also require the replacement of parking spaces if constructing an ADU involves conversion or demolition of parking.

ADU Approval Process — Common Issues

Each element of a locality's process can encourage or hinder development of individual ADUs. Whether through ordinances, complex review processes, or internal department training, expertise, and coordination (or lack thereof), a locality has significant ability to influence ADU development within its jurisdiction.

Coastal Zone Considerations

Developing an ADU on land located within the Coastal Zone may lead to longer entitlement and permitting timelines, depending on the location. In a 2024 report by the Terner Center For Housing Innovation, San Diego showed no statistically significant difference in the average time from application to permitting in the Coastal Zone compared to outside of it. Conversely, Los Angeles County and Orange County did show a statistically significant difference in permitting time from projects in the Coastal Zone versus outside of it. In Los Angeles, ADU approval in the Coastal Zone averaged 113 days longer compared to outside of the zone, while Orange County showed an average gap of 132 days between Coastal Zone and non-Coastal zone ADU permit approval.

[15] San Diego Development Services Information Bulletin (January 2021). Accessory Dwelling Unit/Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit. https://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/forms-publications/information-bulletins/400

The delays around ADUs proposed in the Coastal Zone can be attributed to Coastal Development Permit (CDP) requirements, which are sometimes needed *in addition to* a separate building permit. Obtaining a CDP involves a *separate* permitting process in addition *to* other permits required by jurisdictions, further extending ADU approval timelines.[16] However, last year the state legislature passed AB 462, requiring coastal development permits for ADUs to be approved or denied within 60 days and eliminating Coastal Commission appeals. This law aims to remove the unpredictability of longer review timelines and appeals, preventing the loss of thousands of dollars during extended approval periods.

Further complicating the process, obtaining a CDP requires conformity with Coastal Zone zoning rules, which can be a major source of delay. In Monterey County, complex zoning rules, particularly in the Coastal areas, hinder the ADU approval process. The County continues to work on updating its ADU and JADU regulations to align with recent state law, specifically regarding the Local Coastal Program. It is important to note that Monterey County adopted a new local ADU in 2025,[17] and as such, ADU applications submitted prior to the adoption of new rules face uncertainty or outdated standards, creating confusion and likely resulting in approval delays. For one developer in Monterey County, the "realistic timeline" for an ADU build ranges anywhere from ten to eighteen months, with ADU permit review and approval taking up to six months.[18]

[16] California Coastal Commission. *Protecting California's Coastline and Upholding the California Coastal Act*. Retrieved from https://www.coastal.ca.gov/enforcement/cdp_pamphlet.pdf
[17] Marino, P. (Nov. 2025). *New county ADU ordinance will allow more units in the coastal zone after board vote.* Monterey County Now. https://www.montereycountynow.com/blogs/news_blog/new-county-adu-ordinance-will-allow-more-units-in-the-coastal-zone-after-board-vote/article_b7f4bde6-fa42-44af-b5f8-21ccfc4dea3e.html
[18] Aldridge Construction. (2025, October). *How Long Does It Really Take to Build an ADU in Monterey County? A Local Contractor Explains*. Aldridge Construction. Retrieved from https://aldridgeconstruction.biz/how-long-does-it-really-take-to-build-an-adu-in-monterey-county-a-local-contractor-explains/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Lack of Coordination Between Departments

Under California law, ADU permit applications must be ministerially approved or denied within 60 days; however, a lack of coordination between local planning and building departments regularly stretches the review process well beyond that timeline. Applicants can face multiple rounds of clarification requests, not necessarily tied to code violations. Even if a project is ultimately approved, the delay adds uncertainty and undermines the project applicant's original schedule.

In San Francisco for example, a resident named Joe Peters submitted an application for an ADU at 801 Corbett Ave in 2019 that the City did not approve until 2022. The project proposed converting 18 parking spaces outside of a 21 one-bedroom-unit apartment building into ADUs. There would be no modifications to existing units, nor would any commonly accessible amenities be removed from the building. The project was, however, delayed by at least five months due to miscommunication between the Rent Board and the Planning Commission. While the media claimed the City was "fast tracking ADUs," Peters asserted that when the Planning Department and the Department of Building Inspection switched to electronic submittals during COVID, "it took them six months to realize they literally lost our plans and then another six months to get around to looking at them." Issues with the planning staff, as well as Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) for building permits, caused Peters to miss the market cycle and resulted in higher construction costs. According to Peters, the project became "an undeniable loss."

Lack of Consistency Within Departments

Another issue faced by ADU applicants is the lack of consistency and alignment within departments. Without proper training or clear directives, ADU applicants are often met with Planning Departments that send frequent requests for clarification or unexpectedly shift project requirements. Understandably, such needless back-and-forth between the applicant and the local agency reviewing the project considerably affects the cost and financial viability of a project.

In Monterey County, a property owner submitted two planning applications for a project with an ADU and JADU. The first was submitted in July 2023, followed by a second application in June 2024 using the State Builder's Remedy application form, which included the same project plans with a deed restriction on the Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit for rent to a low-income household. (The Builder's Remedy prohibits a locality from applying its zoning or general plan standards to disapprove any housing project that makes at least 20% of its units affordable to Lower-Income households or 100% of its units affordable to Moderate-Income households.)[19]

This second application was filed after planning staff informed the applicant that the original project application failed to comply with objective zoning standards. Both applications are still pending at the planning approval stage, a far cry from the 60-day ministerial review timeline required for ADUs by State Law. The developer attests that the County refused to acknowledge the Builder's Remedy application, repeatedly denying the application of the Builder's Remedy. Meanwhile, the original project application has been delayed by California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review since the County refused to find that the project qualified for a class 3 exemption. While the property owner has not scaled back or cancelled either project, they are effectively left in limbo as the applications have been appealed and continue to be under review. As a consequence, the property owner now faces a significantly increased cost due to the approval delay with no end in sight.

[19] *The California Builder's Remedy*. YIMBY Law. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yL2RmbdhLsA0HkkTvzixUP-6bDUhVbE_pZvOuTPh4IM/edit?usp=sharing

Recommendations

To overcome the barriers to ADU production analyzed above, achieve local ADU production goals, and ensure compliance with state-mandated permitting timelines, jurisdictions should adopt a series of targeted process improvements. These improvements fall into three key categories — policy compliance, internal process, and external process — and work together to streamline workflows, reduce applicant uncertainty, and improve permit turnaround times.

Clarify ADU Policies

Municipalities should periodically revise their ADU ordinances to ensure simplicity, clarity, and accessibility for homeowners, as well as full compliance with state mandates. Thoughtfully structured, easily navigable policy is crucial to stimulating ADU production; conversely, ambiguous or inconsistent regulations deter homeowners and prolong project timelines.

At minimum, localities should amend ordinances to be compliant with state law. Beyond compliance, localities can adopt pro-ADU policies that surpass minimum state requirements. This can be accomplished through removal of size requirements and setback limits. Enacting less restrictive ordinances provides homeowners greater opportunity and fosters a more conducive environment for ADU development. Less stringent requirements mitigate internal barriers, minimize delays and financial risk, and reduce uncertainty for developers.

Improve Internal Processes and Cross-Department Coordination

Local leadership should set explicit expectations for Planning, Building, Fire, Public Works, and related divisions to prioritize ADUs, ensuring consistent interpretation and timely review across departments. A unified local government will guide departments toward meeting the 60-day permit turnaround required by state law or facilitating even faster time frames.

In addition, local governments should regularly audit permitting workflows and monitor submission-to-issuance timeframes in order to identify bottlenecks and ensure continuous improvement. Frequent training for planning staff and technical reviewers also ensures consistent application of ADU policy, improves communication with applicants, and reduces errors in initial submittals.

Enhance External Processes and Applicant Experience

One way to reduce confusion and frustration of ADU builders is to establish a committee or task force dedicated to reviewing ADU applications and improving the process. This group should bring together members of all relevant departments to conduct concurrent reviews and issue unified comment letters, reducing rework for applicants and improving permit issuance efficiency. Additionally, the group can serve as a central resource for homeowners — answering questions, clarifying requirements, and guiding them through the design and permitting process to improve submission quality and overall project success.

Localities should also implement digital application and plan review systems. Electronic systems can streamline the submission process, minimize delays, and enhance accuracy and accessibility for both staff and applicants. Moreover, online application submission and review increase the ease of collecting and analyzing data on incomplete, withdrawn, or denied applications, which can provide insight into recurring policy and process challenges.

Conclusion

Based on these examples, it is clear that ADU production has been slowed or even eliminated in these ten localities because of restrictive local development standards and inconsistent, inefficient approval processes. These barriers continue to limit the full potential of ADUs in California, and homeowners are left to navigate a complex and costly permitting and construction process.

When ADU production slows, jurisdictions fall further behind on meeting Regional Housing Needs Allocation targets and statewide housing supply goals. As a key component of California's housing growth, any delays directly undermine the regional and state-level push for increased ADU production. Preventing these lower-cost units from entering the market limits rental supply and contributes to upward pressure on rents, especially in single-family neighborhoods where new housing is scarce.

As a result, homeowners are not able to effectively utilize state laws meant to ease the ADU approval process. These people are not large-scale, market rate developers with a slew of resources. Rather, they are people with fewer financial resources who are forced to absorb extended project timelines, surprise costs, or months of carrying expenses without rental income. Homeowners often rely on ADUs as a way to help family members with cognitive disabilities achieve some degree of independence, develop multi-generational living opportunities, or even generate rental income.

Furthermore, local processes, unclear regulations, or practical obstacles slowing down projects weakens the intent of the California Legislature, inviting further state intervention or stricter mandates to ensure compliance. It could also result in an increasingly negative perception of state intervention. When homeowners experience delays despite state reforms, public perception of housing policy effectiveness declines, reducing support for future reforms and fueling skepticism toward housing initiatives more broadly.

Jurisdictions must employ straightforward and standardized implementation of state ADU law. Local processes must align with legislative intent in order to accelerate ADU production and support ADU development as a powerful tool for solving the housing shortage.

VI. Appendix One

State Requirements[20]

ADU Standards	State Exempt ADUs and JADUs (Gov. Code § 66323)	All Other ADUs (Gov. Code § 66314-66322)
Size	**Detached ADU:** Up to 800 square feet. **Conversion ADU:** Must be located within the converted space of a proposed single-family home or an existing single-family home or accessory structure, or within the converted, nonlivable space of an existing multi-family dwelling. On a single-family property, an existing accessory structure may be expanded by no more than 150 square feet to accommodate ingress and egress. **JADU:** Up to 500 square feet, must be located within an existing or proposed single-family home (which includes an attached garage).	**Detached:** At least 850 square feet for a studio/one-bedroom; 1,000 square feet for a 2+ bedroom ADU (or 1,200 square feet for jurisdictions without a local ADU ordinance). **Attached:** At least 850 square feet for a studio/one-bedroom; 1,000 square feet for a 2+ bedroom ADU. If there is an existing main structure, jurisdictions may cap the maximum size allowed at the greater of: 1. a percentage of the existing primary dwelling or 2. 850 square feet for studio or one-bedroom and 1,000 square feet for a 2+ bedroom ADU. Jurisdictions without a local ADU ordinance must allow up to 50% of the existing primary dwelling, which cannot restrict an 800 square-foot or smaller ADU. **Conversion:** Must be located within the converted space of a proposed or existing single family home or accessory structure, or within the converted, non-livable space of an existing

[20] California Department of Housing and Community Development. (2026, March). *Accessory Dwelling Unit Handbook*. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/sites/default/files/docs/policy-and-research/adu-handbook-update.pdf

		multi-family dwelling. On a single-family property, an existing accessory structure may be expanded by no more than 150 square feet to accommodate ingress and egress.
Setbacks	**Detached:** No more than 4-foot side or rear setbacks for new construction. **Single-Family Conversion ADU and JADU:** Must be sufficient for fire and safety.	**Side and rear:** No more than 4-foot side or rear setbacks for new construction (may reduce required side and rear setbacks to less than 4 feet). **Front setbacks:** May be applied, but cannot preclude an ADU of at least 800 square feet from being built, even if the ADU would be partially or wholly within the front setback. **Conversions or rebuilds:** No additional setbacks required; applicants may use the footprint of the existing building so long as it is sufficient for fire and safety.
Height	**Detached ADUs:** Up to 16 feet. **Detached ADUs within a ½ mile walking distance from a major transit stop or high quality transit corridor:** Up to 18 feet plus 2 feet to accommodate a roof pitch. **Detached ADUs on a lot with a multi-family, multi-story dwelling:** Up to 18 feet.	**Attached ADUs:** Up to 25 feet or the maximum allowed by the underlying zoning, whichever is lower (allows for ADUs built above attached garage). **Detached ADUs:** Up to 16 feet. **Detached ADUs within a ½ mile walking distance from a major transit stop or high quality transit corridor:** Up to 18 feet plus 2 feet to accommodate a roof pitch (allows for two-story ADUs). **Detached ADUs on a lot with a multi-family, multi-story dwelling:** Up to 18 feet

Parking	**ADUs:** No parking may be required. **JADUs:** No new parking may be required, *but* replacement parking may be required if JADU converts space in an attached garage.	Jurisdiction may waive all parking requirements for ADUs. Otherwise, **one parking space** per ADU may be required. **Exceptions:** No parking can be required if ADU is: ● A State Exempt ADU ● A studio ● A conversion ADU ● Within ½ mile of transit, ● Within an architecturally and historically significant historic district ● Within one block of car share, ● Not provided required on-street parking permits (if applicable) ● A permit application for an ADU is submitted with a permit application for a new single family or multifamily dwelling on the same lot, provided the ADU or parcel satisfies all criteria listed in Government Code Section 66322(a)(1)-(5).