

How ADUs Can Help Us Age in Place

By Deb Nugnes, Senior Manager Home Care Program

The Cape, renowned for its scenic beauty and coastal charm, has long been a coveted destination for retirees and older individuals seeking a peaceful retreat. However, beneath the surface of this idyllic landscape lies a pressing concern: the availability and affordability of housing for the aging population. As Cape Cod grapples with the challenges of an aging demographic, recent regulatory changes allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) offer a ray of hope, potentially revolutionizing housing options for seniors and fostering a resurgence in multi-generational living.

Most older residents of Cape Cod plan to age in place. However, current housing options are falling short of meeting their evolving needs. With limited availability of affordable and accessible housing designed specifically for seniors, many find themselves facing difficult choices as they navigate retirement. ADUs present a promising solution by offering a flexible and cost-effective alternative that enables elderly individuals to remain within their communities while maintaining independence.

ADUs, also known as granny flats or in-law suites, are secondary dwelling units located on the same property as a primary residence. These units can vary in size and configuration, ranging from converted garages to purpose-built cottages, and provide versatile living arrangements that can accommodate a wide range of diverse needs. ADUs can alleviate pressure in many housing related issues but have a particular usefulness for seniors. By allowing seniors to downsize without leaving their familiar surroundings, ADUs facilitate aging in place while simultaneously alleviating housing pressures on Cape Cod.

Moreover, recent regulatory changes aimed at promoting ADU development have sparked optimism among advocates for housing. All fifteen towns in Barnstable County have adopted zoning that allows for the creation of ADUs, making it easier for homeowners to create additional living spaces on their properties. Barriers, such as skyrocketing building supply cost and high interest rates still exist, but the climate on Cape is more friendly to ADUs than ever before. This shift not only expands housing options for seniors but also opens doors to intergenerational living arrangements that promote social cohesion and mutual support.

The benefits of ADUs extend beyond mere housing provision, offering a holistic approach to elder care and community integration. For many seniors, living near friends and/or family members provides invaluable emotional support and companionship, enhancing their overall well-being and quality of life. ADUs facilitate multi-generational living by accommodating adult children or caregivers, fostering interdependence, and strengthening family bonds.

Furthermore, the economic advantages of ADUs cannot be overlooked, particularly in a region like Cape Cod where housing affordability is a major concern. By creating opportunities for rental income or housing assistance programs, ADUs offer a sustainable solution to the housing crisis facing senior residents. For retirees on fixed incomes, renting out an ADU can supplement their financial resources, helping them to remain financially secure in retirement.

In addition to addressing the immediate housing needs of our older neighbors, ADUs hold the potential to revitalize Cape Cod's communities and promote sustainable growth. By encouraging infill development and utilizing existing infrastructure, ADUs minimize the environmental impact associated with urban sprawl while preserving the character and charm of established neighborhoods. This balanced approach to housing development ensures that Cape Cod remains a vibrant and inclusive community for residents of all ages.

Today, the Cape faces an opportunity to embrace the potential of ADUs and transform housing options for the elderly, shining as an example for other communities with similar demographic challenges in the process. By embracing innovation and collaboration, local stakeholders can work together to create a more resilient and inclusive society that values the contributions of every generation. With ADUs paving the way for multi-generational living, Cape Cod's older residents can look forward to a future where they can age with dignity, grace, and the support of their loved ones. If you are interested in ADUs or want to make one yourself, please contact your town's planning or building department, or learn about the ADU program at <https://haconcapecod.org/program-services/adu-program/>.