



Policy Position: Accessory Dwelling Units

In 2018, the Needham Council on Aging's Board of Directors issued a policy position advocating for a change in the Town's bylaws to allow accessory dwelling units (ADU), which aligns with its mission "to respond to its older residents' needs by providing a welcoming, inclusive, and secure environment where individuals and families benefit from programs, services, and resources that enhance their quality of life, and provide opportunities for growth and knowledge" [1].

The Council on Aging's Board of Directors strongly supports the Planning Board's current proposal to amend the Town's Zoning By-laws to allow accessory dwelling units by right; to allow accessory dwelling units in unattached accessory buildings such as a garage; and to allow more flexibility about who can live in such units, including a renter.

These amendments to the Town's Zoning By-laws would have the potential to benefit seniors and allow them to age in Needham in a myriad of ways, including:

- Generating additional income from renting out an ADU;
- Housing a caregiver, if in need of living assistance; and
- Downsizing to an ADU, if they are unable to maintain their house or their house is no longer accessible for them.

In the 2022 Survey on Healthy Aging in Needham, 35% of survey respondents reported being somewhat worried about the impact of the cost of living on their financial security, while 14% reported being very worried or extremely worried. Concern about the impact of cost of living on financial security was inversely related to annual household income, with only 6% of respondents with a household income over \$100,000 reporting being very or extremely worried, but 39% of those with a household income under \$50,000 reporting being very or extremely worried [2].

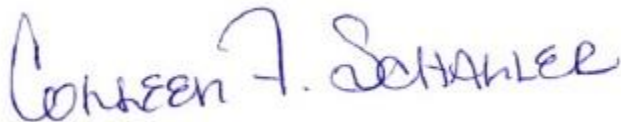
Affordable, age-friendly housing significantly impacts older adults. Accessory dwelling units "increase the supply of rental housing for a range of physical abilities, stages in life, and income levels" [3]. Needham lacks affordable, available, accessible, age-friendly housing. Respondents of the Survey on Healthy Aging in Needham provided open response comments speaking to the limited housing options for seniors who wish to downsize, lack of affordable housing for seniors, limited availability of housing for seniors, and desired changes to accessory dwelling unit rules. Responses consistently included a strong desire to remain in Needham. One respondent, on a desire to modify the accessory dwelling unit rules, said *"I am particularly interested in having accessory dwelling units available in town. Many seniors could stay here and be relatively independent with this kind of support (and*

many families would benefit, also)" [2]. Additional feedback in the survey indicated that the sizing of the houses that are available in Needham are not appropriate or age friendly for seniors who are looking for smaller, accessible homes which are easier to maintain. In fact, nationwide, the median square footage of new single-family homes has increased from 983 in 1950 to 2,261 in 2020 [4].

The Needham Council on Aging's Board of Directors stands with the Needham Board of Health, the Center for Housing Policy, AARP, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, among others, in support of accessory dwelling units [4]. The Board of Directors agrees with a report for Needham's Public Health Division which states accessory dwelling units "are a low-impact, high-value way to address the problem of diminishing housing options" [5].

Agreeing with the Board of Health and its Policy Position on ADUs, the Needham Council on Aging takes one strong exception with the Zoning By-law as drafted, specifically the definition of who qualifies as a family member. The definition does not account for non-traditional families, those who come together by choice to form a domestic unit. Such domestic arrangements may consist of friends, extended family, or roommates, and may occur due to spousal death, infirmity, financial necessity, loneliness, or any other reason that people come together to create support. There is no one "right" definition of family, and Needham's zoning by-laws should not attempt to establish one.

This Policy Position was formally adopted following a unanimous vote of Needham's Council on Aging during a noticed public meeting on April 13, 2023.



Colleen Schaller, Chair
Needham Council on Aging

References

- [1] "Who We Are," [Online]. Available: <http://www.needhamma.gov/525/Who-We-Are>.
- [2] S. Formica, "Survey on Healthy Aging in Needham," 2022.
- [3] "Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit Modules - Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)," [Online]. Available: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/smart-growth-smart-energy-toolkit-modules-accessory-dwelling-units-adu>.
- [4] "Study: Boston-Area Communities Should Loosen Restrictions for Accessory Dwelling Units," Pioneer Institute, 17 July 2018. [Online]. Available:



https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic_opportunity/study-boston-area-communities-should-loosen-restrictions-for-accessory-dwelling-units/.

- [5] C. Miara, "Accessory Dwelling Units: A Report for Needham Public Health Division," 2017.