



# Be my Neighbor

## Untapped Housing Solutions: ADUs and Conversions



**We can create thousands of new homes in the region just by allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and conversions of large single-family homes to two- or three-family homes, most of which would be in areas near transit.**

We must expand housing opportunities for people of all incomes throughout the entire New York metropolitan region, but we cannot meet our housing growth needs solely through large new developments. Fortunately, we don't have to. We can work with the buildings we have.

### WHAT IS AN ADU?

An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a smaller secondary home on the same lot as a primary dwelling. ADUs have a private kitchen, bath, bedroom(s), and living space. They function as a separate apartment, but can either share a roof with the primary residence or can be located in another building on the property. They can be built by converting yard space, garages, basements, or attics.

### WHAT IS A CONVERSION?

A conversion divides an existing home into multiple units, turning a single-family home into a duplex or triplex. Spaces above garages, on ground floors, or in attics of houses can also be converted into small apartments for an elderly parent, a care provider, or a renter. This both makes an oversized home more affordable, allowing someone who might ordinarily need to downsize to stay in their home, and creates a new home for a new resident.

### PART OF THE SOLUTION

Population growth was significantly outpacing housing growth throughout the region prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The region was also facing an imbalance between job growth and production of new homes. Even if the economic crisis resulting from COVID-19 temporarily reverses this trend, the pandemic is pushing us toward a new wave of homelessness and foreclosures that is creating an even greater urgency to expand a diverse range of affordable housing choices. Allowing and encouraging more housing options will result in a stronger and more resilient recovery.

This factsheet summarizes a 2020 Regional Plan Association report.  
**Learn more at [rpa.org](https://www.rpa.org)**



## BENEFITS FOR COMMUNITIES

Resistance to ADUs and conversions stems in large part from misinformation. Fears like the lack of space for parking and overcrowding in schools is often overstated. In reality, ADUs and conversions have many positive impacts for communities.

- ▶ Providing a secondary income that can allow aging homeowners to stay in their homes longer.
- ▶ Providing spaces where older relatives and younger adults can live comfortably together and care for one another, adding housing options for people in different stages of life.
- ▶ Bringing new residents who work and shop in the community.
- ▶ Reducing housing costs.
- ▶ Allowing for sheltering-in-place.
- ▶ Reducing the cost of maintaining and building infrastructure by increasing density
- ▶ Facilitating better and more frequent transit

## COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

One of the most important things we can do in this or in any future outbreaks is make sure everyone has a place to live, and safely and comfortably shelter-in-place if need be. The most at-risk populations in a pandemic are people experiencing homelessness, those living in group quarters like nursing homes, or those forced into overcrowded housing situations. Solving our housing crisis is a large part of solving our public health crisis, and allowing for more conversions and ADUs will go a long way toward solving our housing problem.

The current and future need for sheltering-in-place and remote working is already driving demand for the types of housing presented in this report. Having an ADU available is valuable for families during a health emergency. If a loved one needs to self-quarantine, they can do so in relative comfort, with a kitchen and bathroom of their own. Families can take comfort and help each other by being close by, even as they need to stay physically separate.

## DESEGREGATING OUR REGION

Across our region, predominantly White municipalities have self-segregated in areas and created exclusionary zoning barriers where the only residential buildings allowed are large single-family detached houses. In these areas, Black and Latinx families are vastly underrepresented. For residents, especially for people of color, buying a home is increasingly out of reach, commutes continue to get longer, and opportunities to move up the economic ladder are declining. ADUs and conversions are by no means a silver bullet solution to either racial segregation or to our housing affordability crisis. However, allowing them is a necessary and incremental step in the right direction. By implementing policies and programs that promote ADUs and conversions, we will be in a better position to address many of the physical and institutional barriers we have created in the New York metropolitan region and ensure everyone has the opportunity to live a full and healthy life.

## Regionwide Recommendations

1. Promote ADUs and conversions through New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut state legislation.
2. Make it easier to legalize and construct adus and make conversions through zoning code changes and local ordinances.
3. Create more flexible parking requirements.
4. Provide technical assistance, financing, and info.

## NYC Recommendations

1. Allow housing conversions and adus in NYC by eliminating zoning requirements that exclusively require large detached single-family dwellings.
2. Reduce multi-family consolidations.
3. Support NYC's Basement Apartment Program expansion on a city-wide level, and look for opportunities for other ways to add ADUs.
4. Rethink off-street parking requirements for two- and three-family homes.