



Comments in support of accepting the accessory dwelling unit provisions of PA 21-29
Simsbury Zoning Commission
November 15, 2021

Dear Chairman Ryan and Members of the Simsbury Zoning Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of the accessory dwelling unit provisions of Public Act 21-29 (PA 21-29). AARP Connecticut believes that everyone should have the ability to choose how they live as they age, and we think that these provisions will provide older adults and people of all ages with new opportunities to find safe and affordable housing in their community.

A third of Americans, both homeowners and renters, pay more than what they can afford on housing, and one in four renters spends more than half of their income on housing.^[1] When people spend increasingly high portions of their income on housing, it jeopardizes their ability to maintain their lifestyle and save for their futures as they age and in many cases results in the person/household being cost burdened or severely cost burdened.^[2]

Accessory apartments, sometimes called accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, have potential to improve the lives of older adults, family caregivers, and people of all ages. According to Connecticut's most recent State Plan on Aging (2020), "Between 2010 and 2040, Connecticut's age 65 and older population is on pace to increase by 57%. However, the projected growth of the population between the ages of 20 - 64 is less than 2%, and the age 19 and under population is projected to decline by 7%."^[3] As the demographics of our state undergo this unprecedented change, we need to make sure that our communities are able to quickly adapt to changing housing needs and preferences.

AARP's most recent Home and Community Preference Survey indicates that nearly seven in ten adults would like to remain in the community for as long as possible as they age, and 63% would like to stay in their current residence.^[4] Accessory apartments are small houses or apartments that exist on the same property lots as a single-family residence but still provide separate living quarters, and because they tend to be smaller and more affordable than single-family houses, they can be a good housing option for older adults who want to downsize but still live in a neighborhood setting. Accessory apartments are also good options for individuals who want to live near a caregiver (with caregivers occupying either the accessory apartment or the main residence) or who want to use their property to generate extra income.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of our older adults and has made us realize the importance of accessory apartments as they can provide a safe, comfortable alternative to other living situations. Accessory apartments can fill a number of roles that homeowners may never have needed before, like providing a place for your aging parent to live instead of a nursing home, or for your boomerang kid to come back to when they've lost their job, or for you to work remotely.^[5]

People age 50-plus who would consider creating an accessory apartment say they would do so in order to:^[6]

^[1] <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-rent-afford-2017-6>

^[2] Cost burden is defined as paying more than 30% of household income for housing (rent or mortgage, plus utilities). Severe cost burden is defined as paying more than 50% of household income for housing, available at: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_featd_article_092214.html

^[3] <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AgingandDisability/AgingServices/State-Plans/2021-2023-CT-State-Plan-on-Aging.pdf>

^[4] https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/liv-com/2018/home-community-preferences-survey.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00231.001.pdf

^[5] <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/05/business/accessory-dwelling-units-parents.html>

^[6] *ibid*

- Provide a home for a loved one in need of care (84%)
- Provide housing for relatives or friends (83%)
- Feel safer by having someone living nearby (64%)
- Have a space for guests (69%)
- Increase the value of their home (67%)
- Create a place for a caregiver to stay (60%)
- Earn extra income from renting to a tenant (53%)

An important component of Public Act 21-29 (PA 21-29) is that it allows construction of accessory apartments "by right." This still allows for local authorities to make sure that ADU construction is within zoning and building codes without prolonging the process of construction, but it creates fewer opportunities for obstruction from neighbors and organizations who are opposed to new housing in an established neighborhood. In this way, creating an accessory apartment would be like building or remodeling a home or building any accessory structure. AARP supports "by right" construction of accessory apartments because it reduces costs and red tape but still leaves certain checks and balances in place to ensure that the accessory apartment is appropriate. We would urge the Simsbury's Zoning Commission to not opt out of PA 21-29 and allow ADU construction "by right" and help provide more housing options to the residents of Simsbury.

We are also sharing with you a digital version of "The ABCs of ADUs", which is a primer for elected officials, policymakers, local leaders, homeowners, consumers and others, providing a 20-page introductory and best-practices guide for how towns, cities, counties and states can include ADUs in their mix of housing options.

We would like to thank the Zoning Commission for this opportunity to talk about the importance of ADUs and how it can help Simsbury's housing production keep pace with the demand for affordable and accessible housing. AARP Connecticut is committed to working with you to effectively address Simsbury's housing needs. If you have questions or wish to discuss these items further, please contact me at: adoroghazi@aarp.org or 860-597-2337.

Thank you for your consideration.

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AARP Connecticut