

POLITICS > COLORADO POLITICS

Englewood vote means Grandpa can live out back for cheap

But can a limited number of garden cottages, granny flats alleviate city's affordable housing challenge?



Anya Semenoff, The Denver Post

A renovated carriage house in the backyard of Brian and Jenn Superka on Jan. 6, 2016, in Denver.

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With the cost of housing still on an inexorable rise in the metro area, Englewood architect Randal Friesen sees accessory dwelling units as a key to solving the area's affordable housing puzzle.

The only problem is that new ADUs — think “granny flats” or “garden cottages” that are often used to house an aging parent or a child not quite ready to fly the nest — weren't allowed in Englewood.

Until now.

On Monday, the city council narrowly approved an ordinance allowing ADUs to be established in more than half of Englewood's residential zoned areas. The suburb of 35,000 follows in the footsteps of several metro-area communities that have loosened rules on accessory dwelling units, including Denver, Arvada and Golden.

Englewood's vote is good news for Friesen, whose adult daughter can now live in a small alley house on a lot he owns in the city, just a few feet from a full-size home he would build there.

“Affordable living is what's not available out there,” he said. “My daughter can't afford apartments at the rates apartments are renting for.”

The latest S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller survey pegged [Denver's home price increase at nearly 7 percent](#) from late 2017 through late 2018. In an [Apartment List report released last summer](#), median rents in Denver clocked in at \$1,050 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1,330 for a two-bedroom unit.

In the suburbs, the rates were higher: Englewood's median rent was \$1,220 for a one-bedroom apartment and \$1,540 a month for two. Two bedrooms in Parker and Thornton had medians above \$1,800.

But ADUs are not the answer for a number of Englewood residents, who fear the infill units will invite congestion, generate parking headaches and fundamentally change the nature of neighborhoods in this inner suburb. While ADUs are often used to put a roof over the head of a relative or friend, in Englewood they will be able to be rented on the open market as well.

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ing to strangers, opponents argue, brings to the neighborhood a

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Those arguments played out at last Monday's council meeting, where both those touting and lambasting ADUs took to the microphone to persuade their elected leaders to vote their way. In the end, the ordinance passed on a 4-3 vote. The measure takes effect Feb. 9.

John Voboril, a planner with Englewood, said the city has been dealing with the ADU issue for nearly five years, holding multiple open houses and council study sessions designed to [nail down the details before regulations were passed](#).

The new ordinance mandates that the owner of the primary residence on the property where an accessory dwelling unit is built live there for at least nine months of the year. It limits the size of an ADU, be it a unit built on top of a detached garage or a cottage placed in the backyard, to 650 square feet. The location of the unit is also restricted to the rear third of the lot.

The rules stipulate that an off-street parking space be provided for each ADU.

"We're going to have the strongest ADU enforcement mechanism for ADUs in the state of Colorado," Voboril said.

Not that Englewood is a complete stranger to the concept. Because the units were popular across the country before World War II in response to a housing shortage, the city says nearly 200 ADUs already exist in the older part of Englewood and are grandfathered in.

Voboril said the city is projecting that six to seven new ADUs a year will come online in the city over the next decade.

Nearby Arvada invited ADUs back in 2007 and city spokeswoman Allison Trembly said there are now 20 permitted units in the city, including basement conversions.

Trembly said Arvada's ADU stock is evenly split between use as a home for a family member and a rental. The city's intent with ADUs, she said, is to offer "a market-based housing option that would allow property owners to reinvest in their property and provide a more affordable option for other people such as seniors and young adults while also protecting the character of existing neighborhoods."

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Renee Martinez-Stone, director of the West Denver Renaissance Collaborative, said ADUs should be a part of any affordable housing strategy, but they are not the complete solution. Her organization is in the [midst of a two-year pilot program that gives low- and middle-income households](#) in southwest Denver neighborhoods access to loans to build ADUs, for which the city established a regulatory framework in 2010.

Martinez-Stone’s goal is to get 10 backyard homes into the pipeline by this summer, with a 5-year goal of 250 ADUs. Despite their smaller size, ADUs are expensive to permit, build and hook up, she said. A garden cottage in Denver can run from \$95,000 to \$150,000, depending on size. A unit over a garage is even more.

But she praised Englewood for even making ADUs an option, something many other communities have not yet done.

“If you’re not zoned for an ADU, you’re never going to get it,” Martinez-Stone said.

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