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# UNLOCKING HOUSING POTENTIAL: ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS IN BERKS COUNTY



By Jim Sarro, AIA, Principal Architect,  
Muhlenberg Greene Architects

As housing needs evolve, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) have emerged as a versatile solution for homeowners and builders in Berks County. These secondary housing units, often referred to as in-law suites, granny flats, or carriage houses, offer a unique opportunity to maximize property use while addressing the housing shortage.

### What Are ADUs?

ADUs are self-contained residential units located on the same lot as a primary dwelling. They can be:

- **Detached:** Separate structures like converted garages or standalone buildings.
- **Attached:** Additions to the main home, such as basement or attic conversions.
- **Interior:** Portions of the existing home modified to function independently.

Typically ranging from 400 to 800 square feet, ADUs include essential

amenities like a kitchen, bathroom, and living space, ensuring autonomy for occupants.

### Benefits of ADUs

- **Multigenerational Living:** Accommodate aging parents or returning adult children while maintaining privacy.
- **Rental Income:** Generate additional revenue by renting out the unit.
- **Property Value:** Enhance property appeal and marketability.
- **Efficient Land Use:** Optimize existing land use without the need for extensive development.



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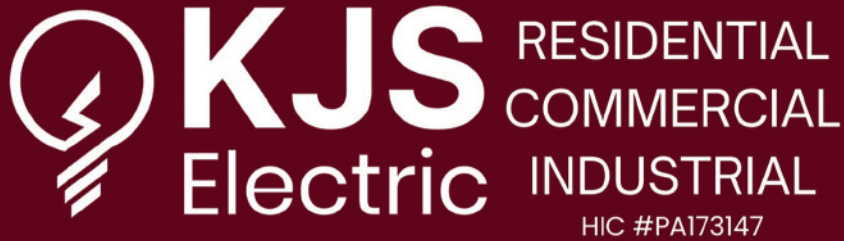


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### Navigating Berks County Ordinances

In Pennsylvania, zoning regulations are predominantly determined at the municipal level, leading to variations across Berks County. It's crucial for homeowners and builders to consult local ordinances before initiating an ADU project.

For instance, municipalities like Douglass Township have specific supplementary regulations that may impact ADU development. While other townships may have unique provisions or restrictions.

Given the diversity in local regulations, it's advisable to:

1. **Consult Local Authorities:** Engage with municipal planning or zoning offices to understand specific requirements.
2. **Review Zoning Codes:** Examine local zoning ordinances for provisions related to ADUs.
3. **Seek Professional Guidance:** Collaborate with architects or planners familiar with local regulations to ensure compliance.

*Jim Sarro, AIA is a Principal Architect at Muhlenberg Greene Architects with a deep understanding of local regulations and a commitment to sustainable design. Jim assists clients in creating attractive, functional, and code compliant spaces.*

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The client is the center of everything I do: their needs, goals, and preferences, their financial considerations, and what type of coverage they are accustomed to. I have lots of happy customers who enjoy being able to call throughout the year when something comes up they want to discuss. For this reason I get many referrals, for which I am grateful. We form lasting relationships and there is hardly anything I would not do for my clients.

### Design Considerations

When planning an ADU, consider:

- **Integration:** Ensure the design complements the existing property's aesthetics.
- **Accessibility:** Incorporate features that accommodate occupants of all ages and abilities.
- **Sustainability:** Utilize energy-efficient materials and systems to reduce environmental impact.
- **Privacy:** Design layouts that provide privacy for both primary and secondary units.

### Conclusion

ADUs present a compelling opportunity for homeowners in Berks County to enhance their property's functionality and value. By understanding local zoning ordinances and thoughtfully planning the design, these units can serve as a practical solution to evolving housing needs.

For personalized guidance on ADU development, feel free to reach out to us at Muhlenberg Greene Architects. We're here to help you navigate the process and bring your vision to life.

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