

**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
DIVISION OF HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

2020 W. El Camino Avenue, Suite 500  
Sacramento, CA 95833  
(916) 263-2911 / FAX (916) 263-7453  
[www.hcd.ca.gov](http://www.hcd.ca.gov)



December 23, 2021

Jonathan Lait, Planning Director  
Planning Department  
City of Palo Alto  
250 Hamilton Avenue – Fifth Floor  
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Dear Jonathan Lait:

**RE: Review of Palo Alto's Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance under ADU Law (Gov. Code § 65852.2)**

Thank you for submitting the City of Palo Alto (City) accessory dwelling unit (ADU) ordinance (Ordinance No.5507) adopted September 26, 2020, to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). The ordinance was received on October 20, 2020. HCD has reviewed the ordinance and is submitting these written findings pursuant to Government Code section 65852.2, subdivision (h). HCD has determined that the ordinance does not comply with section 65852.2 in the manner noted below. Under the statute, the City has up to 30 days to respond to these findings. Accordingly, the City must provide a written response to these findings no later than January 23, 2022. HCD will review and consider any written response received from the City before that date in advance of taking further action authorized by Government Code section 65852.2.

The adopted ADU ordinance meets many statutory requirements. However, the ordinance must be revised to comply with State ADU Law (Gov. Code, § 65852.2), as follows:

- **Section 18.09.030(a)(3) *Units Exempt from Generally Applicable Local Regulations*:** The text of this Section and the applicable portion of Table 1 indicate the maximum size of a newly constructed detached ADU is 800 square feet. Although a local agency may establish minimum and maximum size requirements for ADUs pursuant to subdivision (c)(1) of Government Code section 65852.2 within limits, a local agency shall not establish a maximum square footage requirement for either attached or detached ADUs that is less than 850 square feet and 1,000 square feet for an ADU that provides more than one bedroom. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (c)(2)(B).) Therefore, all relevant

sections of the ordinance must be amended to comply with this mandate in State ADU Law.

- Section 18.09.030 *Units Exempt from Generally Applicable Local Regulations*: There appears to be a conflict between the text of this section and Table 1. The number of allowable units are correctly noted in Table 1 as “1 ADU and 1 JADU.” The text of section 18.09.030(a) appears to limit allowable units to “an ADU or JADU.” Government Code section 65852.2, subdivision (e)(1)(A), requires an ordinance to allow “one ADU and one JADU per lot... .” The City must amend the ordinance to correct this inconsistency, clarifying that “one ADU and one JADU” are permitted if all the conditions of section 65852.2, subdivision (e)(1)(A) apply.
- Section 18.09.030(b) *Application of Development Standards*: Local agencies may establish standards for ADUs pursuant to Government Code section 65852.2, subdivision (a); however, these standards do not apply to ADUs constructed pursuant to subdivision (e). Table 1 impermissibly applies “underlying zoning” “for front setback[s]” to subdivision (e) ADUs. (Mun. Code, §18.09.030(b).) Subdivision (e)(1) describes permitted setbacks in full. Unless underlying zoning for all residential areas conforms to subdivision (e) limits, this table must be amended to comply with statute. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (e)(1)(A).)
- Section 18.09.030(b)(1) *ADU Height in Flood Zones*: The City has impermissibly restricted the height of ADUs. It appears that the City establishes minimum elevations for the first floor of structures in the flood zone, which is essentially the entire city to varying degrees. To account for this, the zoning code allows most residential structures to exceed otherwise maximum allowable heights for development. The City does not extend this accommodation to ADUs. Currently, Table 1 states that the maximum height for new, detached ADUs is 16 feet, but includes a caveat that “units built in a flood zone are not entitled to any height extension.” (Mun. Code, § 18.09.030(b).) In many instances, this would operate as an impermissible restriction on ADUs. Under State ADU Law, the City must accommodate an ADU of at least 800 square feet and 16 feet in height. Thus, the caveat in Table 1 is potentially confusing and could restrict the height to less than 16 feet. If it would in fact operate to effectively limit the height of ADUs to less than 16 feet, it would operate as an impermissible restriction on ADUs. As such, Table 1 should be revised to clarify that this limitation does not apply where necessary to permit an 800-square foot ADU that is at least 16 feet tall. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subds. (c)(2)(C) and (e)(1)(B)(ii).)
- Section 18.09.040(b) *Daylight Plane and ADU Height Standards*: Table 2 states that “daylight plane” acts as a limit on the height of ADUs. In many instances,

this may not be a problem; however, daylight plane concerns cannot be used to unduly limit the height of an ADU. ADUs are permitted up to 16 feet high. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subds. (c)(2)(C), (e)(1)(B)(ii).) Therefore, in considering restrictions that the City is imposing on ADUs for daylight planes, the ordinance should note the 16-foot height allowable for ADUs. This Table must be amended to clarify this point.

- Section 18.09.040(b) *Units Subject to Local Standards*: Table 2 sets out the development standards for ADUs that do not qualify under section 18.09.030. Although the City has more freedom to establish development standards for these ADUs, that is not without limitation. This section, and Table 2, must be amended to clarify that—notwithstanding the development standards—an ADU of at least 800 square feet, 16 feet in height, and with four-foot rear and side-yard setbacks is permitted as required by State ADU Law. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (c)(2)(C).)
- Section 18.09.040(b) *Floor Area and JADUs*: Development standards can account for ADUs in their measurement of the floor area restrictions or ratio (FAR). But these standards may not account for or consider JADUs. A JADU may not be included in this calculation, because a JADU is a unit that is contained entirely within a single-family residence. (Gov. Code § 65852.22, subd. (h)(1).) Footnote 4 of Table 2 impermissibly includes JADUs as part of the FAR calculations. This footnote must be amended to clarify this point.
- Section 18.09.040(h) *Noise-Producing Equipment*: Local agencies may impose development standards on ADUs; however, these standards shall not exceed state standards. Section 18.09.040(h) states that noise-producing equipment “shall be located outside of the setbacks.” This section must be revised to only refer to ADUs since setbacks are not required for JADUs. In addition, this setback for noise-producing equipment for ADUs must be revised to make clear that this setback requirement will not impede the minimum state standards of four-foot setbacks. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (c)(2)(C).)
- Section 18.09.040(i)(2) *Setbacks*: Currently, this section states, “No basement or other subterranean portion of an ADU/JADU shall encroach into a setback required for the primary dwelling.” Under state law, new attached and detached ADUs have maximum four-foot rear and side-yard setbacks. (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subds. (a)(1)(D)(vii), (c)(2)(C), (e)(1)(B), and (e)(1)(D).) Local agencies may impose setback requirements if the minimum rear and side-yard setbacks established by state law are not exceeded. This restriction is concerning on a number of grounds. First, setbacks may not be required for JADUs as they are constructed within the walls of the primary dwelling. Second, this requirement imposes excessive restrictions on ADUs converted from an existing area of the primary dwelling or accessory structure with a basement or subterranean space. Again, these

structures are not subject to setback requirements. Finally, this section would violate State ADU Law if the side or rear setback requirement for an ADU or JADU located in a basement or other subterranean structure exceeded four feet. Requiring ADUs and JADUs to meet the side and rear setbacks for the primary dwellings could exceed the maximum four-foot setbacks set out in State ADU Law. The ordinance must be revised to eliminate these concerns.

- Section 18.09.040(j) *Design*: This section states, “Except on corner lots, the unit shall not have an entranceway facing the same lot line (property line) as the entranceway to the main dwelling unit unless the entranceway to the accessory unit is located in the rear half of the lot. Exterior staircases to second floor units shall be located towards the interior side or rear yard of the property.” These standards appear to apply only to the creation of ADUs and may unduly restrict the placement of an ADU on some lots. Local development standards provided by ordinance pursuant to subdivisions (a) through (d) of Government Code section 65852.2 do not apply to ADUs created under subdivision (e). Please consider eliminating this restriction or modifying it such that it applies “when feasible.”
- Section 18.09.040(j)(2)(A) *Privacy*: The section states, “Second story doors and decks shall not face a neighboring dwelling unit.” This limitation, however, may place an impermissible constraint on an ADU. For example, excessive constraints would be placed on the creation of a second story ADU if residential units were located on all adjacent parcels. In addition, when operating in conjunction with Section 18.09.040(j), noted above, this restriction may prohibit ADUs created under subdivision (e) of Government Code section 65852.2. Accordingly, this provision must be revised to allow for more flexibility. The City could revise the first sentence of this section to state, “Second story doors and decks shall not face a neighboring dwelling unit, where feasible.”
- Section 18.09.040(k)(4) *Parking*: The ordinance indicates if covered parking for a unit is provided in any district, the maximum size of the covered parking area for the accessory dwelling unit is 220 square feet. Further, under this section, the space for the covered parking count towards the total floor area for the site *and* the ADU if attached to the unit. Covered parking should not count towards the total floor area of the site as if it would unduly limit the allowable size of an ADU established by state law, nor should it directly count toward the area available for the ADU. Although standards within an underlying zone may apply when noted in the adopted ADU ordinance, they may not be more restrictive than those contained in state statute. (See, e.g., Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subs. (a)(1)(B), (a)(1)(D)(vii), (a)(1)(D)(x), (c), and (e).) The portion of this section stating “unit unless attached to the unit” should be deleted, or the section should otherwise be modified to comply with state law.

In these respects, revisions are necessary to comply with statute.

HCD will consider any written response to these findings, such as a revised ordinance or a detailed plan to bring the ordinance into compliance with law by a date certain, before taking further action authorized pursuant to Government Code section 65852.2. Please note that HCD may notify the Attorney General's Office in the event that the City fails to take appropriate and timely action under section 65852.2, subdivision (h).

HCD appreciates the City's efforts in the preparation and adoption of the ordinance and welcomes the opportunity to assist the City in fully complying with State ADU Law. Please contact Lauren Lajoie of our staff, at (916) 776-7495 or at [Lauren.Lajoie@hcd.ca.gov](mailto:Lauren.Lajoie@hcd.ca.gov) if you have any questions or would like HCD's technical assistance in these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Zisser', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Zisser  
Assistant Deputy Director  
Local Government Relations and Accountability