



Companion Unit/Junior Unit

City of San Diego
Development Services Department

INFORMATION
BULLETIN
400

October 2019

A Companion Unit is a detached or attached accessory structure on a residential lot that provides living facilities for one or more persons, independent of the primary dwelling unit, which includes permanent provisions for living, sleeping, and cooking. A Junior Unit is an accessory structure that is contained entirely within an existing, habitable single dwelling unit. General Regulations for Companion and Junior Units can be found in SDMC Ch. 14, Article 01, Division 03.

I. COMPANION UNIT

A. Zoning

1. Permitted as a limited use in residential zones.
2. Permitted as a limited use in multiple dwelling unit residential zones where the maximum allowable density is two units based on the existing lot area.
3. Within the Coastal Overlay Zone, a Coastal Development Permit is required for a companion unit.

B. Size

1. An attached companion unit shall not exceed 50 percent of the existing or proposed habitable area of the primary dwelling unit, up to a maximum of 1,200 square feet. A detached dwelling unit is permitted up to a maximum of 1,200 square feet.
2. Installation of a fire sprinkler system shall not be required for new Companion Units or Junior Units, as defined in the SDMC (and stated per 2016 California Senate Bill 1069 as Accessory Dwelling Units) that are 1,200 sq. ft. or less in area when located on the same lot as an existing non-sprinklered dwelling unit.

C. Setbacks

1. An existing permitted garage or non-habitable accessory structure within setbacks may be converted into a Companion Unit, subject to Size limitations.
2. A companion unit may encroach within the interior side and rear yards as follows:
 - a. A structure, up to a maximum encroachment of 30 feet in length.

D. Parking

1. One parking space is required, unless one of the following conditions is met:
 - a. Unit is 500 square feet or less.
 - b. Site is within the Transit Area or Transit Priority Area.
 - c. Site is within a historical designated area.
 - d. Site is located within a residential parking district.
 - e. Site is located within one block of a car or bike share station.
2. The conversion or demolition of a garage requires replacement parking, in addition to the one required space (if applicable). The parking may be placed within setbacks or in a tandem configuration.

E. Other

1. A companion unit may not be sold or conveyed separately from the main dwelling unit.

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2. The owner does not need to live in the primary dwelling unit nor companion unit and both can be rented. A companion unit cannot be used for a rental term of less than 30 consecutive days.
3. Only one Companion Unit is allowed on a premises. A Junior Unit is not allowed on a site with a Companion Unit. Guest Quarters and non-habitable structures are permitted on the same premises.

II. JUNIOR UNIT

A. Zoning

1. Permitted as a limited use in residential zones.

B. Size

1. Maximum of 500 square feet.
2. Installation of a fire sprinkler system shall not be required for a Junior Unit when located within an existing, non-sprinklered dwelling unit.

C. Regulations

1. Shall be located within an existing habitable area of the main dwelling unit.
2. Shall have an exterior entry.
3. Shall have an interior connection to the primary dwelling unit.
4. May have a bathroom, or share a bathroom with the primary dwelling unit..
5. Shall have an efficiency kitchen, consisting of:
 - a. A sink with a maximum waste line diameter of 1.5 inches.
 - b. A cooking facility with appliances that do not require electrical service of more than 120 volts or natural or propane gas.
 - c. Food preparation counter and storage cabinets.

D. Other

1. Prior to issuance of a building permit, an agreement is required that neither the primary dwelling unit nor the junior unit may be sold or conveyed separately and that the record owner shall reside in either the primary dwelling unit or junior unit.
2. A Junior Unit cannot be used for a rental term of less than 30 consecutive days.
3. Only one Junior Unit is allowed on a premises. A Junior Unit is not allowed on a site with a companion unit. Guest quarters and non-habitable structures are permitted on the same premises.

III. PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESS

You must apply for a building permit. Please refer to the Project Submittal Manual, Section 2A, for all general requirements related to the submittal process.

A. Typical Submittal Documents

Minimum submittal requirements for each companion or junior unit proposal includes the following (per Project Submittal Manual, Section 2A):

1. Plans / Calculations:
 - a. Site Plan and Vicinity Map (See Information Bulletin 122).
 - b. Floor Plans and Roof Plans.
 - c. Elevations and Sections (as applicable).
 - d. Structural plans and details.
 - e. Structural calculations and/or truss calculations (as applicable).
 - f. Title 24 Energy calculations.
2. Forms.
 - a. General Application, DS-3032.
 - b. Water Meter Data card, DS-16.
 - c. Storm Water Applicability Checklist, DS-560 (not required for a Junior Unit).

IV. FEES

Please refer to Information Bulletin 501 for all submittal and issuance fees that may apply.

A. Specific to Companion/Junior Units

1. Plan Check and Inspection fees are assessed with the type "Single Dwelling Unit/Duplex Addition/Remodel" found in Table 501A of Information Bulletin 501.
2. Development Impact Fees (DIF) and Regional Transportation Congestion Improvement Program (RTCIP) fees do not apply. General Plan Maintenance Fee is waived, unless subject permit includes work unrelated to companion/junior unit.

VI. HOW TO APPLY

Appointments for submittal are recommended and can be made by calling (619) 446-5300. Walk-in services are also available. Check in at the Development Services Department, 3rd floor, 1222 First Avenue.

Documents referenced in this Information Bulletin

- San Diego Municipal Code, ([SDMC](#))
- [Project Submittal Manual Section 2A](#)
- [Information Bulletin 122, Site Plan](#)
- General Application, [DS-3032](#)
- Water Meter Data Card, [DS-16](#)
- Storm Water Requirements, [DS-560](#)
- [Information Bulletin 501, Fee Schedule -Building Permits](#)