

Residential Accessory Structures Handout

Revised September 2026

What is a Residential Accessory Structure?

- **Ancillary structures, including:** detached garages, carports, workshops, art studios, greenhouses, and storage sheds.
- **Recreation-related accessory structures,** including; swimming pools and spas, cabanas, and enclosures for swimming pools or spas,
- **Detached guest houses** or similar that include conditioned space, and that are intended for occasional overnight use. Occasional overnight use means not more than ten (10) nights in any calendar month. Guest houses may not be used for short or long term rentals and are not considered an independent living unit. Only one such structure shall be allowed on a parcel.
- **Patios and deck structures, including:** uncovered detached raised decks or patios over 18 inches from grade, and detached ground-level patios or decks when covered.
- **Fences,** when accessory to a primary residential use and ***greater*** than allowed heights listed in Section 5.2.5 of the Sacramento County Zoning Code.
- **Cargo containers,** with use standards as listed in Section 3.9.3.T, and development standards as listed in Section 5.4.5, of the Sacramento County Zoning Code.

What isn't a Residential Accessory Structure?

- **Paving or patio areas** 18 inches or less above grade.
- **Raised landscape planters** or edging of up to 18 inches in height.
- **Accessory Dwelling Units or Junior Accessory Dwelling Units.** See the Accessory Dwelling Unit and Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit Standards Handout available at planning.sacounty.gov/us/en/planning-environmental-review/resources.html.
- **Incidental Agricultural Accessory Structures,** including: private stables and corrals, barns used primarily for agricultural purposes, aviaries, and chicken coops. See Section 5.3.2.C of the Sacramento County Zoning Code.
- **Fences,** when they meet the standards of Section 5.2.5 of the Sacramento County Zoning Code.

To review any referenced Zoning Code section, visit the Land Use Regulation Library at landuse.sacounty.gov.

Residential Accessory Structures are permitted as an Accessory Use in all Zoning Districts that permit residential uses

What Standards Must I Follow to Build a Residential Accessory Structure?

Table 5.10.A of Section 5.4.5.A of the Sacramento County Zoning Code (replicated below as of the date of this handout) contains the standards for Residential Accessory Structures. To view the most current version of Table 5.10.A, please visit the Land Use Regulation Library at landuse.saccounty.gov.

Table 5.10.A Development Standards – Residential Accessory Structures in All Zoning Districts, As Allowed

In-Ground Swimming Pools and Spas [9]

Development Standard	Requirement
Minimum Setback Requirements	Swimming pools and spas may not be located within the required front or side street yard. Swimming pools and spas shall not be located within a recorded setback, easement, or no build area, except the rear yards of through lots unless otherwise prohibited by a recorded subdivision map. Pools do not have a minimum setback from primary dwellings, but edge of water must be three feet from the rear and side property line.

All Other Residential Accessory Structure Types [2]

Development Standard	Requirement
Maximum Square Footage [13]	The area of all accessory structures on a single parcel, shall not exceed [3]; - For lots less than 20,000 sq. ft. in gross area: 50% of the habitable floor area of the primary residential dwelling. - For lots 20,000 sq. ft. in gross area or greater, 100% of the habitable floor area of the primary dwelling.
Maximum Building Coverage	30% of required rear yard of primary dwelling [3][10][14]
Maximum Height to peak of roof (feet)	16

Development Standard	Requirement
Provisions for Increased Maximum Height to Peak of Roof	Up to 24 ft. Permitted if increased setbacks are maintained including: i. A rear setback of at least 10 ft; and ii. Side interior setbacks of at least 10 ft; and iii. A 10 ft setback from the primary dwelling. Attached to Detached ADU Residential accessory structures attached to and subordinate to detached ADUs are permitted to match the maximum height for the ADU, provided both the ADU and residential accessory structure meet the increased setback to allow for the increased height.
Number of Stories	1
Separation from Primary Dwelling	Residential Accessory Structures must remain detached from Primary Dwellings.
Residential Accessory Structures Attached to Accessory Dwelling Units	New construction conditioned residential accessory structures shall not be attached (sharing a wall or floor) to accessory dwelling units. This restriction shall apply even if there are no internal connections between the two structures.
Cooking Facilities	Residential accessory structures shall not include cooking appliances, such as an oven, cooktop/range, or microwave. Residential accessory structures may include wet bars.
Overnight Stays	A residential accessory structure may be used for occasional overnight stays (up to 10 days cumulatively in any calendar month) provided that the structure used for overnight stays contains conditioned space and has access to a full bathroom with a bathing fixture (shower or tub). No more than one residential accessory structure may be used for overnight stays at any one time per property. Residential accessory structures shall not be used for permanent habitation, short-term rentals, or long-term rentals.
Front Yard Setback (feet) [4][6]	20
Interior Side and Rear Yard Setback (feet) [4][5][6]	3

Development Standard	Requirement
Side Street Yard Setback (feet) [4][6]	12.5
When Adjacent to Primary Structure	If less than six feet from the wall of the primary residence, accessory structures of any size must meet the same setback as the primary residence. [11]
Minor Accessory Structures	Minor structures or sheds which do not exceed 120 square feet in area and nine feet in height overall may be placed on the interior side and/or rear property line. Front and side street yard setbacks of the applicable zoning district apply.

Maximum Permitted Encroachment Into Required Yard Areas (feet) [12]

Required Yard	Allowed Encroachment
Front Yard and Side Street Yard	Air Conditioning/Standby Generator Equipment: 5 [7] Swimming Pool and Spa Equipment: 5 [7] Other Mechanical Equipment: 5 [7]
Interior Side Yard and Rear Yard	Air Conditioning/Standby Generator Equipment: 0 Swimming Pool and Spa Equipment: 5 [8] Other Mechanical Equipment: 5 [8]

Table 5.10.A Footnotes

PUPF = Public Utilities, Public Facilities easement (per Section 5.2.1)

- [1] Reserved.
- [2] Refer to Section 5.2.5.B, "Development Standards for Walls and Fences" for complete fencing standards.
- [3] For the purpose of this calculation, all roofed space, enclosed or not, shall be counted as space occupied by accessory buildings, except for the habitable space of an ADU. This calculation includes unconditioned spaces attached to ADUs, such as garages, storage rooms, and covered porches.
- [4] Accessory structures must maintain a minimum three foot setback from property lines for any portion of the structure including eaves and overhangs.
- [5] Setbacks less than 5 ft. from property line or other structures, possibly including certain projections and appurtenances, may require fire walls and/or restrictions on non-protected openings as determined by Fire and Building Permits and Inspection.
- [6] If the site has a PUPF that is greater than the listed setback, it becomes the minimum setback requirement.
- [7] Provided said equipment is within a solid fenced yard or enclosure.
- [8] Provided equipment shall be no closer than two feet from any property line.

- [9] Above-ground swimming pools and spas, both permanent and temporary, with a water depth of at least 18" are subject to standards for "All Other Residential Accessory Structure Types."
- [10] In Residential (RD) zones, maximum building coverage is cumulative across both residential accessory structures and incidental agricultural accessory structures.
- [11] The distance between the primary dwelling and residential accessory structures is to be measured as the closest perpendicular distance between the face of the exterior wall of the primary dwelling to the face of the exterior wall of the residential accessory structure. Eaves, overhangs, other projections, open-air attached patios, open-air breezeways, and other open-air appurtenances are to be excluded from such measurement (see Figure 5-11-D).
- [12] The amount of encroachment shall be deducted from the required setback of the structure the equipment is associated with. For example, an HVAC compressor associated with a primary dwelling with a 20 foot required front yard setback may encroach into the front yard by five feet, down to 15 feet.
- [13] The total floor area for all Incidental Agricultural Accessory Structures and Residential Accessory Structures combined shall not exceed 5,000 square feet. Exceptions to this limitation may be permitted with a Minor Special Development Permit, provided that the lot size and primary dwelling square footage potentially allow for a combination of such accessory structures to exceed 5,000 square feet.
- [14] This maximum coverage shall be calculated out of the entire Code-defined rear yard setback. Should a portion of the primary dwelling protrude into the required rear yard setback, it shall not be counted against this maximum coverage calculation.

What if I want to Build a Structure that Doesn't Meet Standards?

Deviations from the standards may be permitted with a Special Development Permit from the Zoning Administrator. This is an entitlement process, meaning that the request will be reviewed through a public hearing, and may not be approved. Current costs run approximately \$9,000 and timelines can range from 4-6 months. Contact us through the email below if you would like more information on this option.

Will my Residential Accessory Structure Need a Building Permit?

Most structures require building permits. See the information provided by the Building Permits and Inspections Division to determine whether the proposed structure meets requirements to be exempt from a permit. The Permit Exempt Residential Accessory Structure Handout can be found at the following link:

<https://development.sacounty.gov/content/dam/cd/building/docs/transition/GI-20%20Residential%20Accessory%20Structures.pdf>

For more information, please contact the Planning and Environmental Review (PER) staff at SacPlan@sacounty.gov or go to the PER website: planning.sacounty.gov.