

Why does Seattle love ADUs?

As a baseline assumption, we should view Seattle as a city that doesn't know what it wants. Well, maybe that is not the right way to say it. What it wants is everything. All at once. The city wants:

1. Lots of housing
2. Lots of control over what is built
3. Lots of development fees

But it's kind of like when you pick a restaurant. You can't get good food, at a reasonable price, really quickly! (Pretend Chipotle doesn't exist for a minute.) Of course not! You have to choose two and then hope for the best on the third. I love McDonald's. Quick, cheap, and tasty....ish, I just have a sore tummy afterwards.

Seattle should pick what they really care about and stop pretending they can do it all. They can't. The biggest problem and first thing to axe is the city's degree that they control development. I'll give a great example of what happened when they relinquished some control over ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units aka Mother-In-Law Apartments). Here's the timeline:

2010 – recognizing the need for more units in the city – Seattle published a backyard cottage (DADU – Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit) guide. Everybody read it. But nobody built anything. Because who the heck would go through the entire design and permitting process to build one. Tiny. Unit. Nobody. Duh.

2010-2019 – they talked and talked and talked about it. Wait, more housing would get built if the owner didn't have to live on the property? Wait, Magnolia homeowners are getting mad, let's wait a few more years. Wait, let's do an environmental impact statement that will take 3 years. Wait, we need to translate this into 98 different languages and do 249 community meetings. But I do give them credit! Finally, they simply backed off the most restrictive parts keeping ADUs from being built:

1. Owner doesn't have to live on the property
2. Can build 2 ADUs instead of 1
3. Some parking requirements were removed
4. Permitting timelines were shortened

Present day – ADUs are under construction all over the city. The city is getting a lot of development fees, the amount of middle housing available is going up, and the magic key that unlocked all that... was the

city simply stepping back. Wow. Makes you wonder what could happen if entitling an apartment building took 3-6 months instead of 3-6 years!

You've seen these all over the city but here's an example of what everyone is doing. Instead of simply building one house, developers maximize their profit by building a principal house that has one attached ADU and one detached ADU. Then, they create condo docs and sell each of the properties separately. They cannot be fee-simple with separate lots because the city doesn't allow ADUs to have their own water meters. So, the only way to create separate ownership is through condominiumization.