ADU Case Study Fact Sheet

ADU Trailblazer Initiative Fact Sheet

The City of Boston has made strides in addressing the regulatory and financial barriers to construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The development of internal ADUs that do not expand the building footprint of the existing home is allowed as-of-right in all neighborhoods, and external ADUs may be developed as-of-right in Mattapan (the development of external ADUs in other neighborhoods requires a special permit). In addition, the Boston Home Center, a division within the City's Mayor's Office of Housing, provides financial support to low- and moderate- income homeowners throughout the City, through the form of grants and interest-free loans, as well as access to lending products that lower the barrier to entry for households below 135% of the area median income (AMI).

The ADU Trailblazer Initiative is a partnership between the Harvard Laboratory for Values in the Built Environment (ViBE Lab) and the Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab, and seeks to identify strategies to designing and constructing ADUs and build local and regional capacity to increase the development of ADUs in Boston. We will partner with three homeowners to build three free-standing external ADUs in Mattapan utilizing different construction methods to understand the challenges and opportunities in the delivery of affordable and low-energy ADUs.

This initiative is framed around the following questions:

1. What are the remaining barriers and opportunities to financing an ADU in Boston, and are current programs and products adequately serving the population of homeowners?
2. What construction types and methods will make the process of constructing an affordable and energy efficient ADU simplest and shortest for homeowners?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities within the permitting and approval process that can be improved through future changes to policies and programs?

In exchange for participating in the study, participants will receive the following benefits:

- ADU design services for a free-standing external ADU (estimated value $20,000)
- Professional construction management oversight and support throughout the permitting and construction processes (estimated value $10,000) to ensure high quality and high energy performance construction

- Reduced construction labor costs (estimated value $10,000)
- Technical assistance with the ADU Financing Process, including assessment of homeowner finances and matching with relevant grant and lending programs

PROPERTY ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Applicant must own and occupy a 1-, 2- or 3-family home, and plan to build their ADU on that same property
- Applicant's home must be within the area of Mattapan where zoning was recently updated to allow for ADUs to be developed as-of-right
- Applicant must meet basic ADU feasibility qualifications
- Applicant's home must be outside of the FEMA Flood Zone
- Applicant's property must have physical area available (see minimum viable site diagram here)

HOMEOWNER ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Agree to collaborate with the ADU Case Study team throughout the construction process by participating in monthly interviews, each lasting approximately 1 hour
- Provide permission to share research findings anonymously
- Utilize the design and construction type recommended by the ADU Case Study team

ADU CASE STUDY ASSURANCES

- During the pre-construction process, ADU construction feasibility, costs, and financing strategy are carefully considered in collaboration with the homeowner
- After design is complete and homeowners are presented with a cost of construction, they will agree or opt-out from the program

PROCESS

1. Homeowners reach out to research team with an expression of interest after receiving a notice of the ADU Trailblazer Initiative opportunity from the Boston Housing Innovation Lab
2. Out of homeowners expressing interest, three homeowners will be randomly selected to move forward in the process
3. Property eligibility is confirmed based upon in-person assessment of the property; if the selected homeowner is not eligible based upon this assessment, a replacement will be selected from the pool of interested and eligible homeowners
4. Design and construction type are matched with property and and homeowner
5. Homeowner confirms financial capacity to construct an ADU based upon cost estimates for construction provided by the research team
6. Homeowner financing, permitting, and construction proceed
7. Post-occupancy study is completed to assess ADU delivery process and performance