

APRIL 2026

WHAT WE HEARD

In October 2025, the Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) began engaging residents and property owners across all six electoral areas on the topic of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). For the purposes of this project, ADUs are defined as independent, self-contained living spaces located on the same property as a principal dwelling. ADUs may include interior, attached, or detached units.

This engagement was initiated in response to provincial legislation introduced in 2023 that requires local governments to update their bylaws to allow more opportunities for small-scale housing on residentially zoned parcels. In 2024, the RDEK amended eight zoning bylaws to meet the minimum requirements of the new legislation. The RDEK is now seeking input from residents and property owners on whether further amendments should be considered to allow additional small/additional homes, and what regulations should apply to them.

This newsletter summarizes what the RDEK learned through an initial round of public engagement conducted from October 2025 to January 2026. Engagement activities included an online survey, three online workshops, 13 in-person open houses, and one-to-one communications held in communities across all six electoral areas.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Feedback from multiple sources, channels and engagement opportunities has been combined to inform the key takeaways outlined in this newsletter.

Overall Direction: Changing existing bylaws to enable additional housing opportunities was supported by over three-quarters of participants across the RDEK. However, this support was conditional rather than blanket. Participants consistently emphasized that any expansion of housing opportunities should be guided by the following principles:

1. Improving housing affordability and the availability of safe homes for long-term residents by:

- Enabling property owners to stay on their land as they age
- Focusing on creating opportunities for family to return to the area

2. Sustaining the rural character of the area by:

- Adding density based on lot size, including the type, number and size additional homes
- Subdividing land cautiously
- Protecting ecosystems, especially in areas with known environmental sensitivities

3. Preserving a high quality of life by:

- Protecting water and sewer infrastructure and supply
- Maintaining fire protection and emergency access
- Avoiding additional traffic and parking congestion

Definition of ADUs: Participants recommended that a more intuitive, easy-to-understand term should be used instead of "Accessory Dwelling Units" to mean the homes on properties that are in addition to the main residence.

Uses of ADUs: Participants most strongly supported ADUs being used to meet long-term housing needs rather than tourist accommodation, including:

- Housing for family members or extended family
- Aging in place
- People needing care and caregivers
- Farm workers or local employees
- Long-term rental housing

Types of ADUs: Participants expressed the need for flexibility in the types of ADUs that are permitted to reflect site constraints (servicing, emergency services, and environmental protections), and to accommodate diverse household needs:

- ADUs on all parcel sizes, but especially smaller parcels, should include:
 - inside (any floor) or attached to main homes
 - above or attached to (ground level) garages
- Detached ADUs and ADUs above, inside, or attached to other outbuildings such as barns or shops were increasingly supported on parcels larger than 2.5 to 5 acres.

? FURTHER INFORMATION

We encourage all residents of the Regional District of East Kootenay to visit the project page to learn more about the ADUs planning process or view the detailed What We Heard Report.

engage.rdek.bc.ca/housing

CONTACT

Sarah Baines, Planner
778-761-1785 | sbaines@rdek.bc.ca

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT PLANNING PROCESS

Numbers of ADUs: Across the regional district, participants generally supported scaling allowable density in proportion to parcel size, although there were differences of opinion regarding specific thresholds for the number of ADUs permitted:

- 0 to 1 ADU on smaller parcels (under 1 to 2.5 acres)
- 2 ADUs on medium-sized parcels (approximately 2.5 to 20 acres), with some participants preferring a minimum threshold of 5 acres and a maximum threshold of about 12 acres
- 3 or more ADUs on parcels larger than approximately 12 to 20 acres
- Support for permitting no ADUs at all generally decreased as parcel size increased.

Locations of ADUs: Participants consistently identified certain areas as higher risk for ADU development unless strong safeguards are implemented. These areas include:

- Locations with limited or uncertain groundwater supply
- Areas with stressed community water systems or uncertain groundwater supply
- Properties with septic or sewer capacity constraints
- Sites with limited emergency access
- Areas at elevated risk of wildfire interface
- Environmentally sensitive areas, including critical wildlife habitat and shorelines or lake systems
- Locations already experiencing parking constraints or traffic congestion

Sizes of ADUs: Many participants preferred a graduated approach in which allowable ADU size increases with parcel size to accommodate homes with more bedrooms on larger parcels. Opinions on maximum sizes ranged from 968 ft² (90 m²) to 1345 ft² (125 m²) and larger.

Heights of Detached ADUs: Participants supported a range of height options, with the strongest support for detached ADUs up to two storeys or matching the height of the single-family home on the property.

Setbacks: Participants expressed strong support for applying the same setback rules to detached ADUs as to principal dwellings.

Spacing between Dwellings (Clustering): Greater spacing between dwellings was generally supported on larger parcels. However, due to concerns that ADUs could be used to facilitate future subdivision, participants preferred placing limits on the total area of a property within which dwellings may be sited.

Parcel Coverage: Participants expressed a wide range of opinions regarding the proportion of a property that buildings and structures should occupy, with suggested limits ranging from approximately 25% to over 50% of parcel area. These perspectives reflected a desire to balance the preservation of rural character with sufficient flexibility to support practical building design and household functionality.

ANTICIPATED PLANNING PROCESS TIMELINE

- ✓ **July 2025** - Project page established
- ✓ **September 2025** - Newsletter #1
- ✓ **October 2025 - January 2026** - Open Houses, Roundtable Meetings, Public Surveys
- **February 2026 - May 2026** - Prepare proposed OCP and zoning bylaw changes
- **Summer 2026** - Ongoing engagement and public review of proposed bylaw and regulations changes
- **August 2026** - Formal Bylaw Adoption Process

Rules of ADUs Within and Outside the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR):

Participants generally supported applying provincial rules to lands located in the ALR and different rules to lands outside the ALR.

Parking Spaces: Participants expressed strong support for more than one parking space per ADU on a property.

Using Manufactured Homes as ADUs:

- Participants supported the use of manufactured homes as ADUs, provided that buildings standards are met and limits are established on their number and concentration on a single property to maintain site quality, neighborhood character, and orderly development.
- Participants expressed strong support for allowing property owners to choose whether to place manufactured homes on temporary or permanent foundations.



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ADUs in Non-Residential Zones: Participants expressed:

- Moderate support for allowing ADUs in commercial, light industrial, and manufacturing zones
- Limited support for allowing ADUs in parks, recreation areas, and conservation-designated lands unless the ADUs supported the preservation and maintenance of those areas

ADUs as Short-Term Rentals: Participants expressed mixed views on the use of ADUs as short-term rentals (STRs), with opinions ranging from allowing them under certain conditions to prohibiting them entirely. Where STR use was supported, there was variation in views on which types of ADUs should be eligible. Many participants emphasized that ADUs used as STRs should be located within fire protection zones, though some support was noted for STR use outside these zones if the homeowner is present on-site.

CONTACT

Sarah Baines, Planner
778-761-1785 | sbaines@rdek.bc.ca