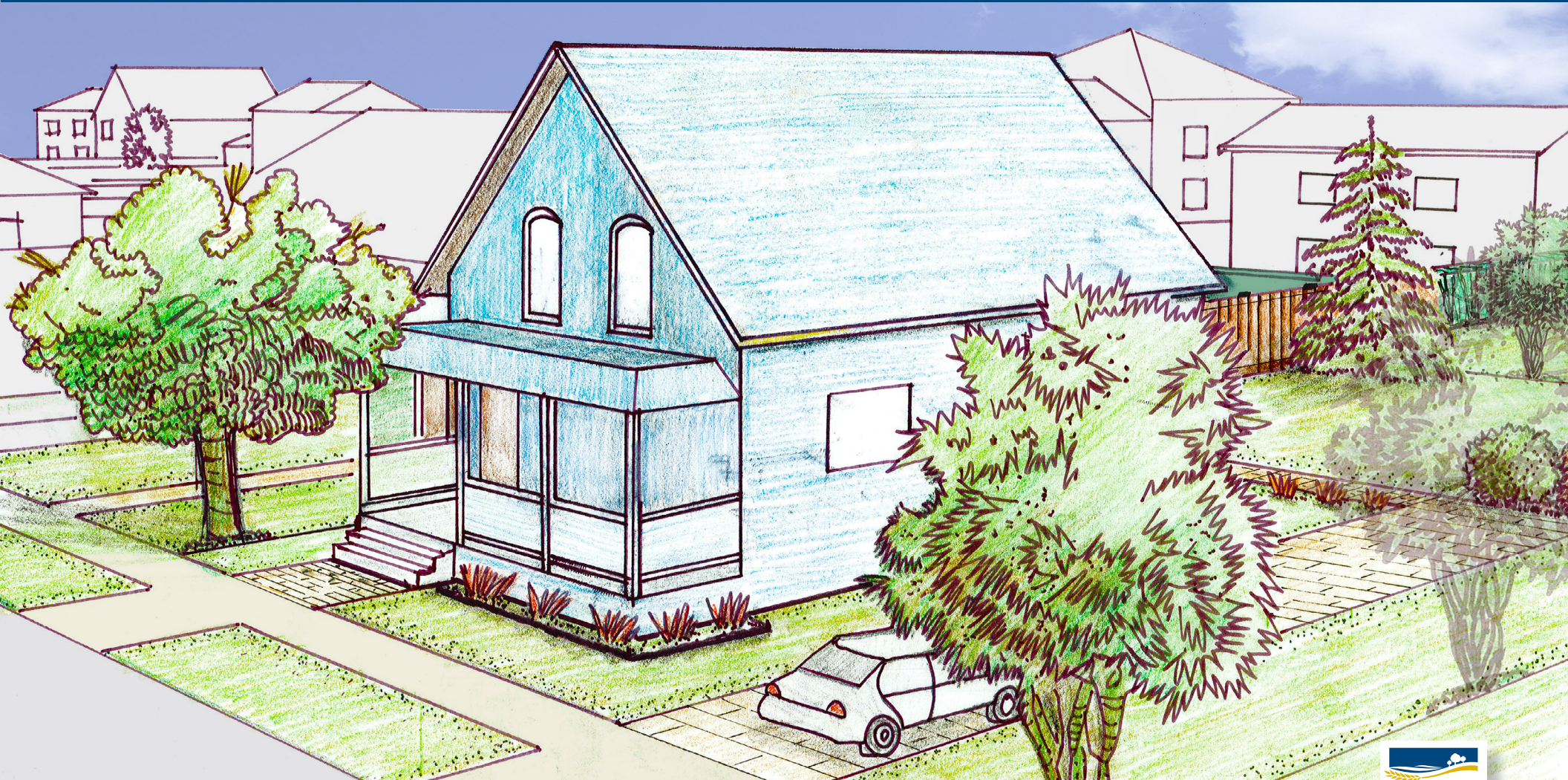


Additional Residential Units Guide

Best Practices for Adding More Units to Your Home

Huron County Planning and Development Department | July 2021



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Introduction

Additional residential units go by many names. They used to be called granny flats or in-law suites. Sometimes, people refer to them by where they are, such as basement, laneway, or backyard apartments. Until recently the Province of Ontario referred to them as Secondary Dwelling Units, as one additional unit could be added to the main unit on a property. Now, with increasing pressure on housing affordability and supply across Ontario and here in Huron County, both the Province and local municipalities are considering permitting more than one additional unit for each main residence; thus, additional residential units.

Additional residential units can be popular for a variety of different reasons. For property owners, they can add a source of revenue. Families might use one to keep a family member close and affordably housed, while giving everyone more privacy than living in the same unit. We created this guide because we see additional residential units as a great way to sensitively add more homes to our existing neighbourhoods, keeping communities together and helping to Huron County's residents, present and future, to have a place to call home.

Additional residential units can be created in different ways:

- an existing home may be sized and designed so that a unit can be split off with minor renovations;
- an addition onto a home can create a new unit; or
- a new unit can be built in an accessory building, like a garage. These units can be purpose built as a new structure on the property or be a temporary, removable building.

This guide uses a series of five property owners in an imaginary neighbourhood to illustrate some of the options to think about if you're considering an additional residential unit. See if you can pick out the six additional residential units in the neighbourhood to the left.

There is a checklist at the end of the document to help guide you through some of the major decisions involved in creating an additional residential unit.

If you have any questions, please contact the Huron County Planning and Development Department and ask to speak to your local Planner. We can help answer questions about zoning, as well as putting you in touch with the local municipal Building Departments.

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Case 1: Second Floor Unit

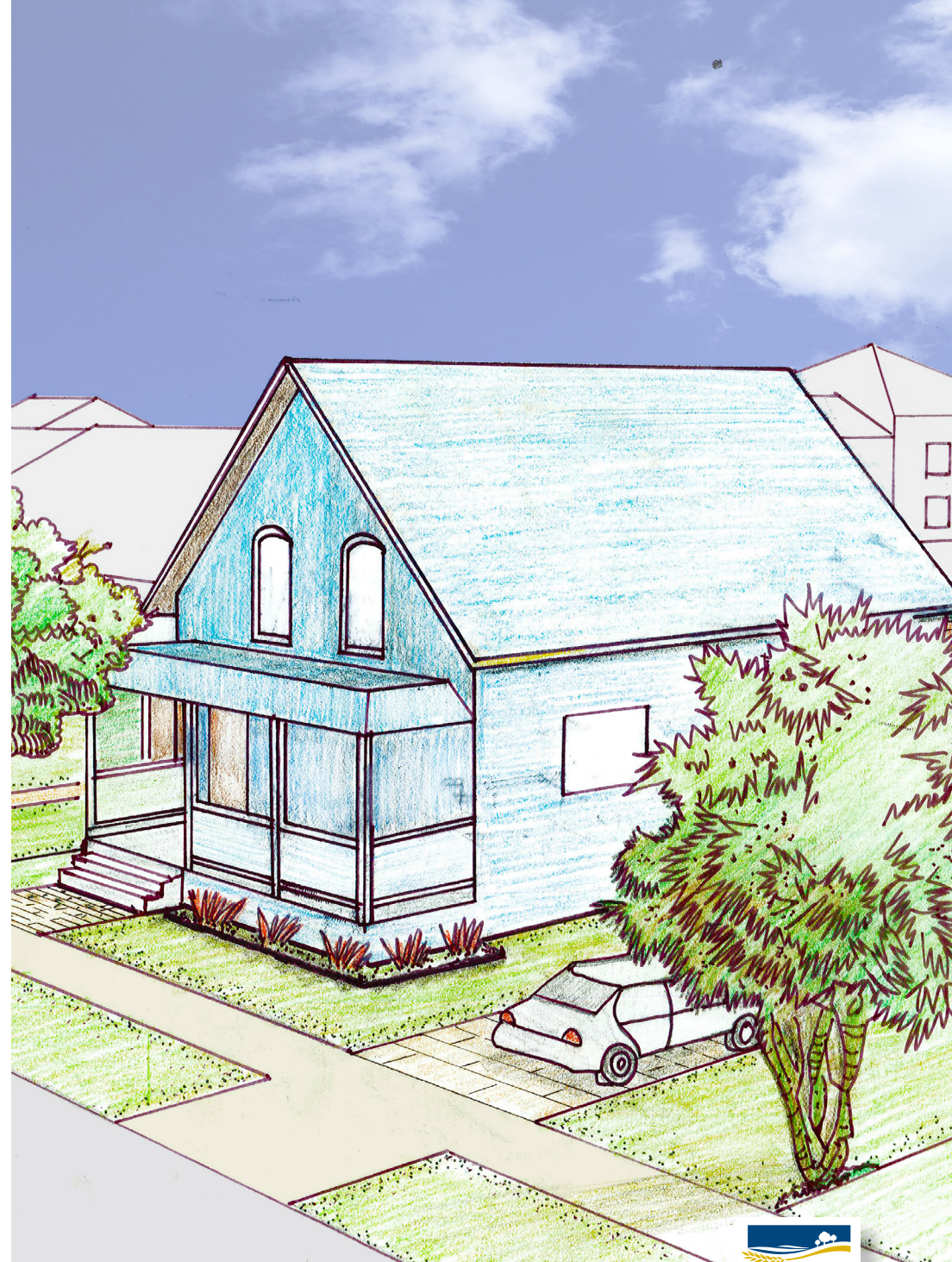
This homeowner was starting to find that it was a struggle to get up the stairs to her second floor bedroom. She wanted to stay in her home as long as possible so she hired a contractor to renovate her main floor to make a bedroom and an accessible bathroom.

She had rented out a room in her house to boarders in the past, so while this work was happening, she decided to have the upper floor converted into a separate unit by adding a kitchenette upstairs.

The existing driveway for her home was long enough for more than two cars, so she decided to provide only *tandem parking*.

Rather than adding a new entrance door on the outside of the house, she had the contractors renovate her front hall into a shared entrance. She made sure to have them soundproof the entrance while they were adding fire separations, because her new bedroom was beside the front hall.

Rather than having the services split for the upstairs unit, she decided to pay all of the utilities herself and include them in the cost of the rent. Whether shared utilities makes sense for your accessory residential unit is something that you can talk over with your local municipal staff, especially the Building Official.



Objective: Aging in Place

One of the goals for promoting additional residential units is to help promote 'aging in place', where residents of the County might be able to stay in their home or community for longer by having access to smaller, more accessible units. This can help reduce social isolation, as well as creating a denser, more inclusive community.

Definition: Tandem Parking

Instead of having each parking space side-by-side, where every car can leave the property without needing the others moved, tandem parking is single file parking, where the first car in needs all following cars moved before it can be pulled out. One parking space per unit is needed.

Tandem parking is permitted for additional residential units, but think carefully about whether it will work for you or your tenant(s).

Common Concern: I Like My Space!

We understand that many residents of Huron County like their space, and don't want to live in smaller units or in a shared building. The intention of allowing additional residential units is to enable people to have more options, not to force people to change how they live.

In some communities, we receive many questions about additional residential units and there seems to be a groundswell of interest in these housing options. Smaller units also can be more affordable to buy, rent, and maintain; can allow for supported independence and social interaction; and can be more energy efficient.

Objective: Sensitive Density

While all additional residential units are intended to help increase the number of households in a neighbourhood without drastically changing the feel of the community, adding a unit in a house with no significant exterior changes is the least visible form of this housing.

Many of our existing neighbourhoods have homes like these already; they can be hard to pick out!



Clarification: What About Boarders and Roommates?

This guide is specifically about creating separate residential units on residential properties. There are many people in Huron County who either regularly or occasionally rent out a room in their home; or friends who will rent a home together. Those are different arrangements than renting a whole, self-contained unit.

Municipal Zoning By-laws don't (and can't) restrict who can live in a unit; living with a friend, roommate or family member is allowed.

Case 2: Rear Addition

On the other side of the block, the owners of a double lot had been thinking of building a garage for a few years. When their brother needed a place to stay while he got back on his feet, they decided to build an attached garage with a separate unit for him to live in.

They haven't decided whether they'll rent out the unit once he moves out, or if they'll keep it as a guest suite.

They loved the look of their century home, so they decided to build the garage as an addition at the back of the house, to minimize the impact on the look of the house. Their Architect designed the addition with a similar roof pitch and windows to help blend it with the older part of the home.

When the unit was first built, their brother didn't have a car so the driveway and garage provided plenty of parking. Now that he's gotten work at a local manufacturer, they may need an additional spot; they're prioritizing avoiding the removal of mature trees.

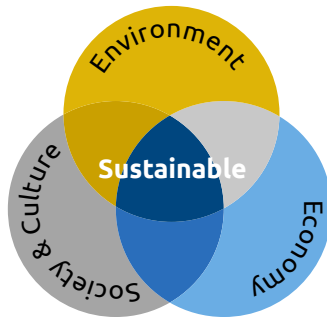
Building the addition at the rear also meant that they kept the second half of their double lot clear, so they can sever the lot in the future. They made sure to design the home so that their *lot coverage* and *landscaped open space* requirements are met if they do sever the vacant land in the future, as well as grading their lot so that *stormwater* runoff goes to the street, not onto the vacant land.

While they were running wiring for the additional residential unit and garage, they decided to set up the electrical for an electric vehicle charging space and a future workshop space.



Objective: Sustainability

A sustainable community needs to balance economic, environmental, and social / cultural needs. Additional residential units have benefits in all three areas, including helping to make housing more affordable, giving options for residents to stay in their communities, and minimizing the environmental footprint of new housing.



Definitions: Lot Coverage and Landscaped Open Space

Lot coverage and landscaped open space are both common regulations in Zoning By-laws that aim to help new developments fit into our existing communities, and help control stormwater runoff. Lot coverage is the total roofed area of a lot, including the main building and any sheds, covered decks or outbuildings. Landscaped open space is area that isn't covered by buildings, and typically also does not include parking area or other hard paved areas.

As with any technical zoning definition, either you or your designer should check with the planner before making any final decisions, as there may be minor differences in your local municipality.

Definitions: Lot Grading, Swales, and Stormwater Management

Stormwater management is the practice of managing where rainwater and snowmelt flows. To avoid causing flooding issues for neighbours or straining municipal infrastructure, best practices for stormwater management include gently grading, or sloping the earth, on a lot so that water flows towards the municipal right of way, while allowing opportunities for it to infiltrate, or seep, into the ground along the way. As our communities become more built up, and with projected precipitation increases from climate change, stormwater management is becoming more and more important and difficult. Low Impact Development has some low cost solutions to help manage stormwater on private property; a particularly common one is the use of swales, which are like shallow ditches. Municipal Building Departments may require a grading plan or certificate as part of the building permit requirements for an accessory residential unit.

Common Concern: Where's the Parking?

The Provincial Government has set the maximum parking requirement for additional residential units at one space per unit. While it's recognized that many Huron County households have more than one car, the parking requirements are just a minimum standard. Property owners are strongly encouraged to consider how much parking each unit will need, and how to handle their overnight parking, especially in the winter. Many municipalities don't allow overnight winter on-street parking because of the need to clear snow from the roads. On the other hand, it's also important to consider households that can't afford a car. The 2019 Huron Perth Living Wage calculates the annual cost of owning and operating a single car as \$6,479.

Case 3: Existing Accessory Building

At the end of the block, a young electrician bought an old bungalow that needed some work. While he was fixing it up, he decided to split it into two units to have some rental income.

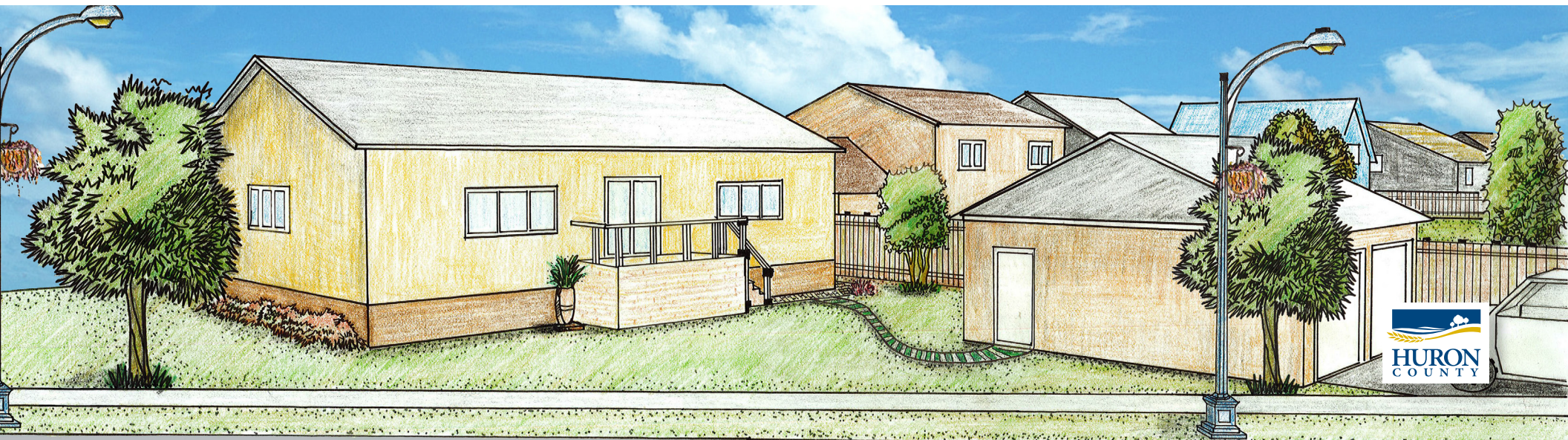
Because the first rental unit had gone well, he decided to gut the backyard garage, or accessory building, to make a third unit; this one being able to meet accessibility standards. A friend has already reached out to say they're interested in renting it because they've struggled to find an accessible rental unit to move into from their parent's home.

The bungalow had an overgrown fence when he bought it. While renovating, he replaced the fence with a new, *privacy fence* to improve the outdoor space on both his own property and their neighbours. He would like to buffer the side running along the street with either a *planting strip* or privacy fence; he'll likely also create some dedicated outdoor space for each unit.

For the converted garage, he's keeping the windows low and pointed out to the street or onto his own backyard to avoid issues for the neighbours.

When he re-roofed and updated the wiring in the bungalow, he was able to prep the electrical to add solar panels on the south roof pitch in the future. He doesn't have the money for the panels now, but the wiring was easier to do up-front than later as a retrofit.

Renovating the garage into a unit poses some technical challenges. First of all, the building wasn't designed to be habitable, so the interior has to be gutted to add appropriate insulation and wiring. Servicing needed to be extended from the house to the garage, because the existing electrical wasn't sufficient and the new kitchenette and washroom needed water and sanitary sewer connections. The municipality and utility companies agreed to separate metering for each unit, so each tenant could directly pay for their own utility costs.



Concept: Accessibility & Visibility

Accessibility is designing spaces to remove or prevent barriers for persons with disabilities. It is obviously important for people who have a physical disability to have housing; but the concept of visitability recognizes that all homes could be better designed, to allow people with disabilities to visit comfortably. Accessibility measures range from barrier-free entrances and pathways, to bathrooms that allow a person using a mobility device to safely use a toilet or sink, to having high contrast between wall and floor materials.

With an aging population, sometimes a focus can be on accessibility for aging residents, but barrier-free design can help people of all ages and abilities.

Concept: Taking Advantage of Unique Lots

With existing neighbourhoods, there are often lots that aren't a typical, perfectly rectangular lot with neighbours on all three sides. When you're designing a site layout for an additional residential unit, consider whether your lot has any unique features that you can use to your advantage.

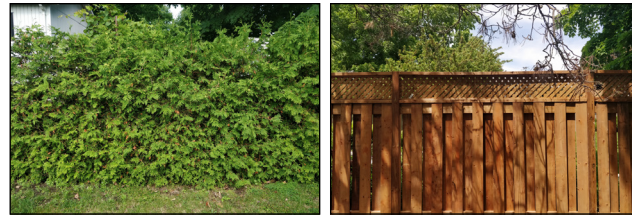
This might be as straightforward as designing around an old maple tree in one corner, involve splitting parking between the front of the lot and a side or rear lot line where it meets the street, or re-purposing a legal non-complying building.

Hiring a professional designer and talking with the municipal planner about your options for an irregular lot might save you headaches, and help you come up with a unique plans.

Definitions: Planting Strips and Privacy Fences

Planting strips are a common Zoning By-law requirement along shared property lines for different uses. They typically take the form of an evergreen hedge, with a minimum width and height requirement. When a municipality requires a planting strip along a property line, the by-law requirements for the design must be followed.

In some cases, a privacy fence might be more desirable. If the preferred design is a board on board style which alternates boards on each side of the rail, be sure to overlap the boards enough so that people can't see through it when looking straight at it. Fences with boards abutting each other should also be designed with minimal gaps.



Definition: Accessory Building

Accessory buildings include sheds, garages, workshops, and generally any building on a residential lot that isn't the main residential use. Many municipal Zoning By-laws include specific accessory building requirements, such as maximum height or coverages, different setbacks from lot lines, or require that the building not be closer to a street than the main building.

Case 4: New Accessory Building with Garage

Next door, the electrician's neighbours found out about his plans to convert his garage to an additional residential unit. Their daughter had moved back home recently, and while they were happy to have her staying with them, they liked the idea of a backyard unit for her to live in. They decided to build a garage with a residential unit above it for her to live in for the time being.

To minimize issues of privacy, they only built a dormer on the side of the roof furthest from their neighbour.

Instead of copying design elements from their home in the design of their backyard additional residential unit, this family took the advice of their designer to use design elements from older houses on their block. The greater slope of the roof helped to blend the unit in with the smaller houses in the neighbourhood, and keep it secondary to the main house.

The existing property had a number of features to work around, including a mature tree, a stormwater swale running the length of the property along the fence line, and a garden in the middle of the yard. By tucking the accessory building at the back corner of the site, these important features could be saved.

Like their neighbour, this family hasn't decided yet how to screen their backyard; they're considering an evergreen hedge surrounded with drought tolerant native species, because they don't use the back of their lot very often.

While they only needed two parking spaces to meet the requirements of the By-law, this family decided to create two new outdoor spaces and two garage spaces with their new unit. Now that they had adult children, they were finding that parking spaces were in high demand.



Concept: Design an Accessory Building with Main Building Elements

The images below show some examples of an accessory building designed with similar design elements to the main building. While this isn't required, it can help to make an accessory building fit with the main building on the lot, especially for older homes. Key design elements to consider are the pitch and orientation of a roof, the colour and material of the siding and roof, and the design of features like dormers, porches, and windows.

Sometimes it looks better to go in a new direction than to incorrectly copy an existing element. Professional designers may be able to help determine what the best approach is for your site.



Landscaping with Natural and Low Maintenance Plants

As the first step in planning your landscaping, you should take an inventory of what existing features you have that you can use. In planning new plantings, consider sun exposure, soil type, drainage and sloping, and what spaces will be used for. By incorporating native plants, your garden can benefit not just residents but also native insects and birds to sustain local ecosystems; drought tolerant plants can survive dry periods without heavy watering and time consuming maintenance.

Your local nursery may have tips on native plants in your area; there are also resources like the City of Guelph's native plants page online here: <https://guelph.ca/living/house-and-home/lawn-and-garden/sample-garden-designs/native-gardens/>; and the Grow Me Instead guides here: <https://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca/resources/grow-me-instead/>

Case 5: New Accessory Building

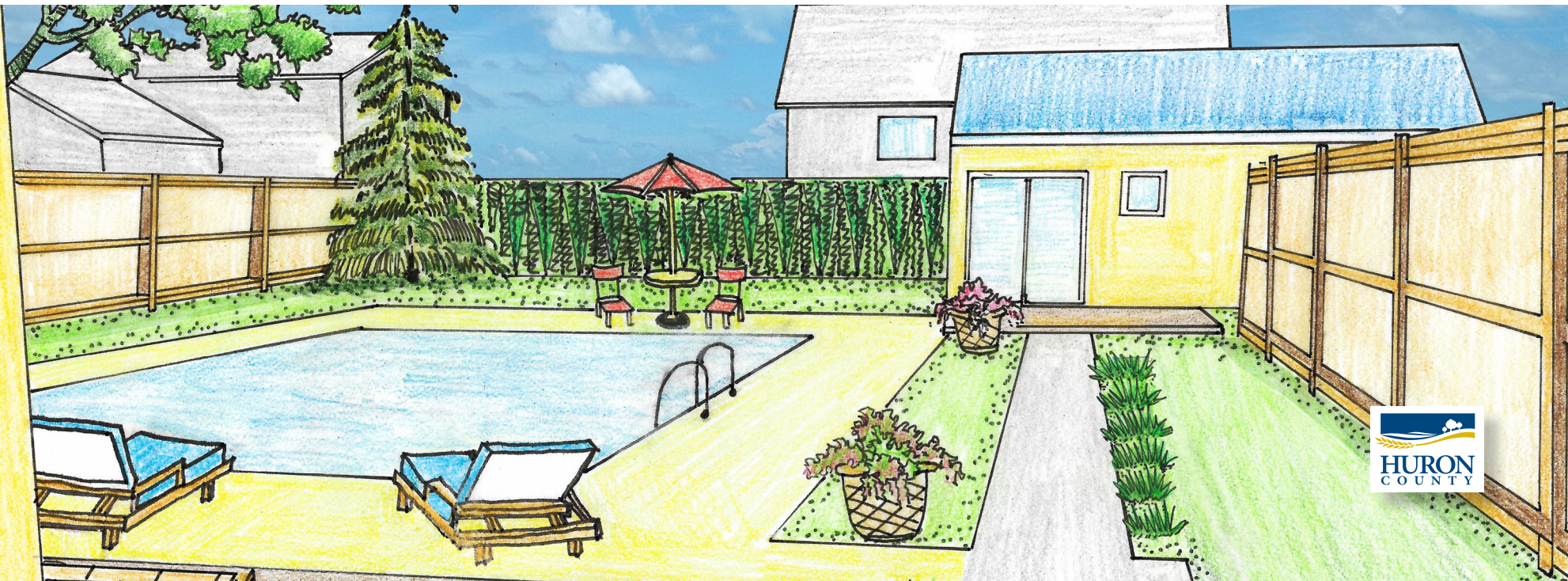
The family living in this home had an aging grandmother who was living alone; between her mobility challenges and the maintenance the property required, she agreed that it was time for her to move into something smaller. Her family had an old pool house in the back corner of their irregular lot that seemed like a great opportunity for an additional residential unit.

After having a contractor come and talk to them about the work and costs involved in renovating the old building, they realized that it would be far simpler to have new residential unit built. Services for the additional residential unit run from the main house, and they made sure the power supply was enough that the space could be used as a workshop in the future. In addition to grading the lot to avoid runoff on neighbours, they hooked the eavestroughs for the new unit into rain barrels to be used for watering gardens.

This family only had one legal parking space, as their garage wasn't considered parking by the municipality. Rather than apply for a minor variance, they decided to create a second tandem parking space beside the house. Realistically, this space will only be used when guests are visiting, as their mother no longer drives.

The yard was already fenced for their pool, but when they built the accessory residential unit they decided to replace a section of chain link fence with a privacy fence. They also created a new, concrete walkway edged with low, shielded garden lighting to the accessory residential unit to help keep it accessible, especially in the winter.

To avoid annoying their neighbours and meet *dark-sky standards*, their new lights are designed to shine down onto the ground, with shields avoiding glare up or onto other properties.



Concept: Dark Sky Lighting Design

Dark sky lighting design is intended to help reduce light pollution. To be considered dark sky lighting, lights should only be on when needed, only light areas that need to be lit, be no brighter than necessary, minimize blue light, and be fully shielded, pointing down.

Definition: Variances and Zoning By-law Amendments

Sometimes, the existing buildings and layout of a lot will make it impossible to meet one or more requirements of the municipal Zoning By-law. In that case, you can discuss with the local Planner whether a Minor Variance or a Zoning By-law amendment might be appropriate. Generally, minor variances are for a small number of minor tweaks to by-law provisions, while a zoning by-law amendment may be for a more major change or a case where several requirements need to be amended.

Both processes can take about four months to complete, and require an application and a fee to be submitted to the local municipality. A notice of the application is circulated to neighbours and/or posted in the local newspaper.

Modular, Mobile, and Temporary Dwellings

An option you might be considering for an additional residential unit are modular, mobile, or temporary dwelling units, whether they be purpose built 'tiny homes' or more traditional mobile homes or modular homes. If you're interested in these moveable dwellings, it is essential to ask your local Planner about your options. Depending on where your property is, and how the local Municipal Official Plan and Zoning By-law regulate these uses, you might need to apply for a temporary use by-law, which often includes an agreement to remove the unit when the by-law expires. Temporary dwellings permitted by a temporary use by-law are referred to as 'garden suites'.


Moveable dwellings are particularly popular on rural properties, especially farms with private services. The moveable dwelling is typically required to be clustered with the main house, to share the septic system and/or well, and to share an access (laneway) with the main house. These requirements are intended to reduce the impact of a new dwelling on surrounding agricultural uses.

Below are examples of manufactured and mobile dwellings produced by Northlander Industries <https://northlanderindustries.com/> and General Coach <https://generalcoachcan.com/>.



Servicing

Services are an essential part of the design and planning for an additional residential unit. Services include drinking water, sanitary sewer, electricity, gas, and stormwater management.

	Check how the property is currently serviced; are there:
	Public Water Services
	Private or Communal Well
	Public Sanitary Sewer Services
	Private or Communal Septic System
	If the additional residential unit would be in a new accessory building, ask the Planner how services should be connected. Often, water and sanitary services are required to be shared between the main building and an accessory building.
	Find the location of all on-site services and connections, and whether your unit would interfere with or require any of these services to be relocated or replaced.
	Consider whether the servicing, particularly water, sanitary / septic and electrical, needs to be upgraded or replaced to accommodate the additional demand from more households.
	Ensure that your roof runoff and grading are designed to avoid causing issues for your neighbours; consider eaves troughs, rain barrels, swales, and other methods of managing your stormwater.

Building Code

Building Permits are required for all additional residential units, whether they are in an existing or new building. The building permit process helps ensure that units are safe for residents.

✓	Ensure your designs comply with the Ontario Building Code, and that you get a building permit for any work.
	The Province’s Build or Buy a Tiny Home guide includes summaries of many Building Code requirements that would apply to an additional residential unit in an accessory building, and is available online here: https://files.ontario.ca/mmah_tiny_homes_en_20191129.pdf
	The Province’s Add a Second Unit guide includes summaries of many building code requirements that would apply to an additional residential unit within the main building, and is available online here: https://www.ontario.ca/page/add-second-unit-your-house
	For your permit, you will need to submit the following to the local Municipality:
	a complete application form and any other forms and supporting documents required by the Municipality
	construction drawings (most municipalities require at least two sets of drawings)
	payment of the building permit fee
	Municipal building inspectors must review the work at various stages during construction, to check framing, insulation, plumbing, interior finishes and other items contained in the Building Code. Confirm with the local Building Official or Inspector about what needs to be inspected, and when.
	Important considerations for additional residential units within the main building are whether building systems (ie. hot water, furnace, air conditioner, electrical panel etc.) will be shared between units; this can have important design implications.

Design

Building an additional residential unit is a significant, and lasting, investment, with many important design considerations for the property owner, residents, and neighbours.

✓	Will your new unit cause any nuisances or inconveniences for neighbours?
	<p>Garbage: Consider a shared, enclosed garbage area to store bins.</p>
	<p>Lighting: Meet 'dark sky' guidelines, by only directing lighting at areas that need to be lit and avoid shining light on neighbouring properties or upwards. Avoid excessively bright lighting.</p>
	<p>Privacy: Consider providing private outdoor spaces for each unit. Avoid having large windows, balconies or entrances overlooking neighbours, direct them towards the main property. Especially avoid second storey windows near shared property boundaries. Consider visual screening, fencing, or a hedge/planting strip to buffer your property from neighbouring yards.</p>
	Designing to fit in.
	Consider ways to complement the existing architecture of the building with the finishes or style details of the new accessory building, or the addition or renovations to a main building.
	<p>Landscaping: Avoid removing large trees, consider planting new shade trees for future residents to enjoy, especially deciduous trees to the south. Consider low maintenance, drought tolerant and native species for landscaping.</p>
	New accessory buildings should be designed to be shorter than the main building, and appear smaller to maintain the prominence of the main building. Where possible they should be behind the main building.
	For additional residential units in the main building, try to avoid new exterior doors or entrances; if they are necessary, aim to locate them on a side or rear wall, or within a covered porch area.

Design

Consider universal design elements that improve accessibility, both for residents and their guests. These elements make aging in place easier. CMHC materials on accessibility are available online here:

<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/developing-and-renovating/accessible-adaptable-housing>

Accessible entrance
Accessible main corridor
Accessible or convertible kitchen
Accessible bathroom
Accessible bedroom



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www.HuronCounty.ca