Denver's ADU Program Is a New Model for Building Affordable Homes

REAL ESTATE TODAY

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The move to allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) across single family neighborhoods has drawn plenty of attention, but the quiet revolution isn't in the zoning map. It's in the partnerships.

Denver's Single Family Plus **(SF+) ADU** initiative, anchored by the Denver Housing Authority (DHA), West Denver Renaissance Collaborative (WDRC), and Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver, is doing something few cities have attempted: pairing land use reform with a turnkey, affordability-focused construction pipeline.

If a recent open house I attended on S. Zurich Court is any indication, it's working.

The SF+ ADU program was born from a simple observation: even when cities legalize ADUs, most homeowners never build them. Costs, permitting complexity, and contractor risk stop projects before they start. WDRC, originally focused on several west Denver neighborhoods, recognized that ADUs would remain theoretical unless the city helped homeowners navigate the process.

So, Denver built a partnership ecosystem.

Homeowners who enroll receive design finance support build services, technical assistance, permitting management, cost estimating, project management, and housing counseling. The program's standardized designs and coordinated construction pipeline, and financial support of up to $55,000 toward construction costs generate approximately $45,000 to $85,000 in cost savings, a number that fundamentally changes feasibility for low- and moderate-income households.

There is no income limit for the homeowner who participates. Rather, the program requires ADUs to be rented at affordable rates, with rents capped at levels affordable to households earning up to 80% of Area Median Income (AMI).

"Approximately 69% of the homeowners we work with are building ADUs to support family," said Chala Mohr, program manager for DHA's SF+ ADU Program. "Every family's situation is different, but we commonly see homeowners creating housing for aging parents, adult children and their families, college age children, or other relatives while allowing everyone to maintain greater independence while staying close together." At the S. Zurich Court home, for example, the homeowner moved into the ADU and rented the main house to a family member.

Habitat serves as the construction partner — a role that is unusual in the national ADU landscape. Habitat's involvement ensures predictable pricing, mission driven labor using a mix of volunteers and paid subcontractors, and a focus on long term affordability rather than speculative value extraction.

The Result: ADUs That Actually Get Built

The ADU I visited on S. Zurich Court is part of a growing portfolio of 26 completed units demonstrating what this model can deliver: energy efficient, pre-designed ADUs built for real families, not theoretical density targets. I was pleased to see that the ADU I visited was heated and cooled by energy-efficient heat pump mini-splits. The program's outcomes are striking. Completed ADUs are renting at an average of 37% AMI, a level of affordability that would be nearly impossible through private market construction.

The program also advances equity goals. To date 88% of participants are low to moderate income, 77% are women-headed households, and 54% are households of color, a demographic profile that stands in sharp contrast to ADU builders in most U.S. cities.

Many cities have legalized ADUs. Few have made them buildable. And almost none have created a citywide, nonprofit-driven construction partnership that reduces cost, manages risk, and ensures affordability.

Portland, Seattle, and Los Angeles have robust ADU markets, but they rely on private contractors and homeowner initiative. Minneapolis and Austin have streamlined permitting, but they do not provide coordinated design build services. Denver's model pairing zoning reform with a public nonprofit construction pipeline is distinctive.

A Blueprint Other Cities Will Study

Denver's SF+ ADU program is still scaling, but its early results suggest a replicable model for cities struggling with affordability and displacement.

By stabilizing homeowners, creating long-term affordable units, and delivering predictable construction outcomes, Denver is demonstrating that ADUs can be more than a zoning experiment, they can be a housing strategy.

And for homeowners standing inside a finished unit, like the one on South Zurich Court, the impact is unmistakable: this is what it looks like when a city decides to help people build ADUs, not just permit them.

Buyers Don't Need to Sign an Agreement to Be Shown a Home

As of August 12, Colorado law requires brokers to have a signed brokerage agreement before performing licensed brokerage services. House Bill 26-1426 requires that the agreement identify the relationship, duties, compensation, and required disclosures.

But here is the critical nuance: simply showing a home is not, by itself, a licensed activity. A broker only needs a signed agreement once a buyer asks for advice, interpretation, or assistance in preparing an offer. Until that moment, opening a door is not a regulated activity. The law governs brokerage services, not basic access. ***The director of the Division of Real Estate said exactly that in a meeting of the Colorado Real Estate Commission this week.***

This is why a conscientious broker handles early questions carefully. If a buyer asks for advice ***before*** seeing the home, I would say: "Let's look at the house first, and then I can answer your questions." This keeps the showing legal and sets the stage for a clear, pressure-free explanation of my professional services and presentation of a representation agreement.

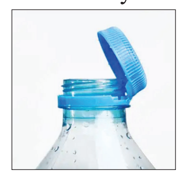
A buyer representation agreement defines the working relationship, duration, scope, and compensation. The standard Colorado form, the Exclusive Right to Buy Listing Contract, also establishes fiduciary duties and clarifies what happens if the seller does not pay the buyer's broker.

There is no legal requirement that the agreement last longer than 24 hours or include any compensation at all. If the buyer would like to "talk turkey" before leaving the listing, they can sign a narrowly tailored, 24-hour agreement like one I created for my broker associates and myself. If the buyer later chooses to make an offer, I can prepare a new agreement appropriate for that stage of the relationship.

A thoughtful broker explains every term and never rushes a buyer at a showing.

EU Mandated Tethered Plastic Bottle Caps in 2024

If you've traveled anywhere in Europe lately, you may have noticed something odd when you twist open a bottle of water: the cap doesn't come off. It flips back like a little plastic trapdoor, stubbornly tethered to the bottle no matter how hard you tug. This isn't a quirky design choice. It's now the law.



As of July 3, 2024, the European Union required all single-use plastic beverage bottles up to three liters to have "tethered caps," closures engineered to stay attached during opening, drinking, and recycling. The rule is part of the EU's sweeping Single-Use Plastics Directive, aimed at reducing marine litter and improving recycling efficiency. Bottle caps, it turns out, were among the most common items found on European beaches, often ingested by seabirds and fish.

The new caps are surprisingly sophisticated. Some use a flexible hinge that lets the lid swing open and snap back; others rely on a rotating strap that keeps the cap anchored to the neck finish. Manufacturers had to redesign both the caps and the bottle necks, adopting new standards so bottling lines could keep running at full speed. It's a massive engineering shift for something most people never think about.

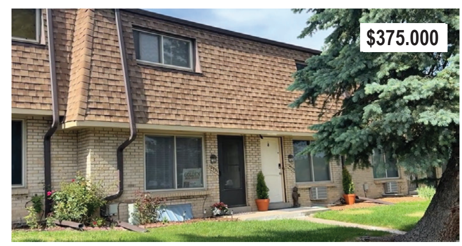
Some Europeans say the caps get in the way when drinking, although I didn't find that true at all. Others complain they're awkward, messy, or simply annoying. But environmental groups counter that the change is already reducing cap litter and keeping more plastic in the recycling stream.

The ripple effects extend beyond Europe. Any beverage company exporting into the EU, whether from the U.S., the U.K., or Asia, must comply. That includes bottled water, sodas, sports drinks, and even niche beverages like CBD or THC-infused drinks. That suggests that the technology is already in use here and could be easily adopted by the U.S.

The tethered-cap mandate is only one piece of Europe's broader packaging overhaul. PET bottles must now contain 25 percent recycled content, rising to 30 percent by 2030. More rules are coming, and packaging companies are racing to innovate lighter, easier-to-use tethered caps that don't annoy consumers.

Whether you love them or hate them, tethered caps are here to stay in Europe. And given how often European regulations influence global packaging trends, don't be surprised if the flip-back cap eventually shows up on American shelves too. Companies who adopt it first could garner some valuable P.R. brownie points.

Price Reduced on 2-Bedroom Applewood Park Townhome



This beautifully maintained Applewood Park townhome at **12931 W. 20th Ave.** has updated systems, a finished basement family room, and two covered parking spaces directly behind the fenced patio. The main floor features a bright south-facing living room, dining area, and kitchen. Upstairs are 2 bedrooms and a full bath with tub/shower. Major mechanicals were replaced in 2023, including the furnace, central A/C, and gas water heater. Newer paint, carpet, and porcelain tile flooring add to the move-in appeal. Take a video tour at **www.GRElistings.com**.

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