



Wayne Kartchner leans on a table inside his recently renovated accessory dwelling unit, or ADU, beside his home in Farmington in March.

BETHANY BAKER | The Salt Lake Tribune

'Trying to unlock' housing supply

Accessories

Continued from A1

"I can't tell you how happy I am that we did," Gibbs, now 64, said. "I will never worry about retirement again."

He's now made a business out of guiding others to do the same — he wrote a 40-page planning guide, created ADU Utah, and built five ADUs and counseled many more through the process.

The upfront investment for ADUs is significant: building one can cost around \$200,000.

But unlike new apartment buildings that face pushback over "neighborhood character" concerns, accessory dwelling units appeal more to homeowners. "We're in such a hurry to build enough housing," Gibbs said, "that we're actually tearing out the character of a lot of cities by eliminating entire neighborhoods to put up a high-rise apartment complex."

MAKING IT EASIER TO BUILD

The Legislature made internal or attached ADUs legal in 2021 and Salt Lake City worked to change its code over the past decade to make it easier for homeowners to build them.

Gibbs said Bountiful's ordinance was difficult to navigate and comply with, while Farmington has a relatively simple process. Salt Lake County is updating its ADU code in unincorporated areas.

Salt Lake City started tweaking its ADU code in 2012, explained Blake Thomas, director of the city's community and neighborhoods department. Even with those changes, between 2018 and 2022, there were only 107 new building permits for the units.

But a year ago, the city adopted a new set of guidelines that more than doubled the number of active permits for ADUs.

"It really just unlocked pretty much the entire map of the city," Thomas said, "and made it an easier, quicker process." It also changed the fee structure for ADUs, lowering the typical cost by about \$2,000.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the city approved 73 permits. Most of the new ADUs are detached garage conversions or newly built structures, Thomas said.

Unlike developers, families usually aren't familiar with navigating a city's permitting process. Salt Lake City's Planning Department created an ADU Handbook and is building out a library of preapproved standard plans to help them.

ADU'S AREN'T AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The backyard units won't fill the state's affordable housing gap. But they can provide more options for higher-income renters.

"We're taking a very 'all of the above' approach in terms of the housing crisis and trying to unlock any supply we can in all ranges of affordability," Thomas said.

Plus, newer neighborhoods with larger homes and small yards might not have the space. ADUs work particularly well in neighborhoods with older homes on large lot sizes.

Gibbs cautions that building an ADU is not a get-rich-quick scheme. "Define your 'why' because this is a building you're going to live with for 20 to 30 years," Gibbs said. "It's not something that pays back to you in three years."

Instead, he encourages people to think about it as a long-term investment.

A PLAN TO AGE IN PLACE

Before building his backyard rental, Gibbs helped his sister who developed multiple sclerosis, build a caregiver suite in her home in West Valley. "Her home" was slowly becoming a prison," Gibbs said because the kitchen, living room and bedroom were upstairs. She had camped out in the basement with a small microwave and refrigerator.

"I was visiting her and I said, 'This just isn't going to work,'" Gibbs said, "we're going to have to figure out how to create a space where you can live, but what's going to happen is eventually you're going to need a caregiver because you're not going to be able to take care of yourself."

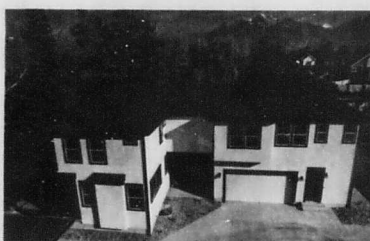
He designed a separate apartment for a caregiver to live in. "I discovered that it was something that could really help many different aspects of somebody in their life," Gibbs said.

Wayne Kartchner, 70, spent about \$100,000 turning his former wood shop into a studio apartment. The small apartment, next to the home he's lived in for more than 30 years, is filled with light, high ceilings and a view of Lago's 150-foot-tall Ferris wheel.

Kartchner plans to rent out his old wood shop, but longer term, the unit could provide housing for a professional nurse if he and his wife need some extra help when they're a little older.

"Most people don't really want to live in assisted living because you leave what is familiar to you," Gibbs said. "You leave your neighbors, you leave your friends."

With their backyard apartments in place, Gibbs and Kartchner hope they'll never have to.



A home at The Pines in Midvale, shown in December 2021, has a second apartment, or accessory dwelling unit.

TRENT NELSON | The Salt Lake Tribune

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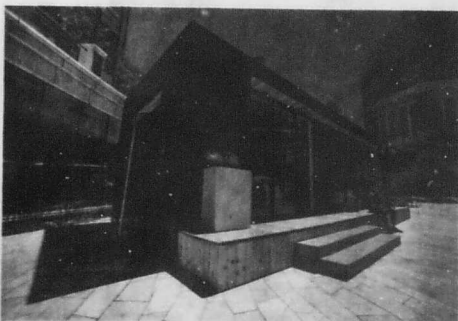
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One of Modal Living's "small but smart" guest houses or accessory dwelling units is shown at City Creek Center in Salt Lake City in June 2019.

TRENT NELSON | The Salt Lake Tribune

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